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Everybody's Magazine

JULY, 1921 No. 1 Vol. XLV

If It's in Everybody's It's a Good Story

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THE August Everybody's will contain instalments of two serials, a novelette, eight short stories, "Prose or Worse," "Everybody's Chestnut Tree" and "Everybody's Chimney Corner" and the story of one of the recent successful plays—"Nemesis," by Augustus Thomas.

The Chimney Corner and the story of a play are new and permanent features. Around the Chimney Corner we will gather with our readers and authors from month to month and talk things over. This month it will be necessary for you to read this department, for it outlines the policy of Everybody's in its new form. Hereafter we hope you will want to read it.

Every month we will tell the story of one of the outstanding dramatic successes, handling it as a short story is handled. The play for next month is "Spanish Love," by Mary Roberts Rinehart.

On the next page is an announcement of "The Red House Murder," a new serial by A. A. Milne. In every normal person there is a little bit of the sleuth-urge, and if you are in this class you will want to read this unusual mystery story. Announcements of the remainder of the August contents will be found on pages 58, 66, 105 and 163.

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At Last—the Unusual in Detective Fiction

The Red House Murder

By A. A. Milne

Beginning in August *Everybody's*

YOU'LL find mystery, thrills, humor and an absolutely new type of detective in this absorbing serial by a man who was one of the editors of *Punch*, author of "Not That it Matters," and of the play, "Mr. Pim Passes By," one of the outstanding successes of the present New York theatrical season.

Of this, his newest story, Mr. Milne says, "I always adored detective stories. I have always thought they must be great fun to write. One day I thought of a rather good way of murdering somebody. Instead of leaving it at that, I went on thinking about it and finally decided that it would make a good story. I hope it has done so—successfully."

The new Milne serial and twelve other big fiction features in August *Everybody's*, out July 15th.

If it's in Everybody's it's a Good Story

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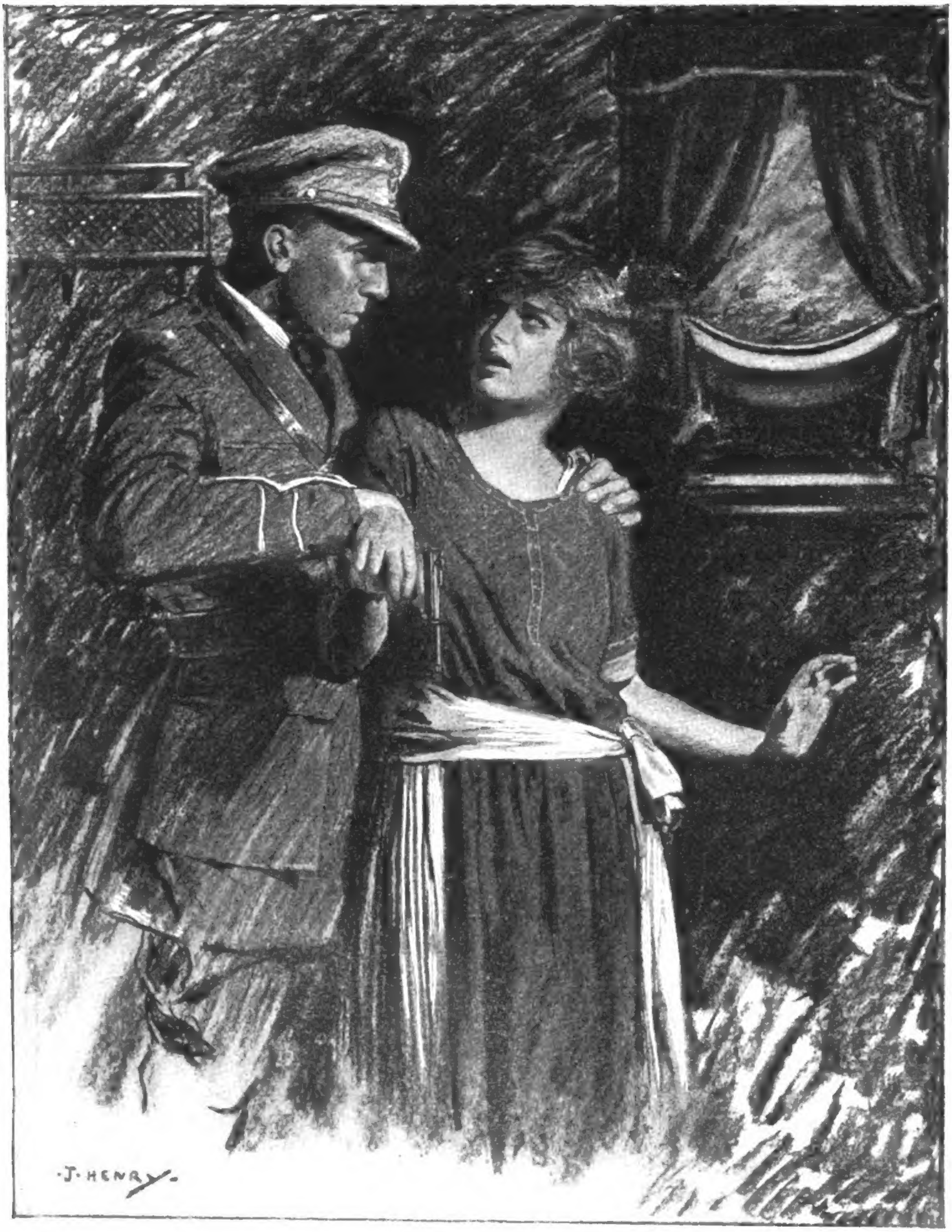

He thrust the papers into the dispatch-case, swung around and found himself looking into the muzzle of a Lueger pistol held by Mary Crewe. With a sudden lunge, Pike seized the pistol. She struggled to wrench it free. Then Pike, throwing his arm about her, bore her through the doorway into her cabin.

A Complete Novelette

The Wax Cylinder

A Fortune, a Girl's Love and a Man's Life Hang on the Solution of a Startling Mystery

By David Gray

Author of "Gallops" and "Ensign Read"

Illustrations by J. Henry

MAJOR LIONEL WORTLEY DE TRAFFORD RIVERS sat in the officers' club at Boulogne and contemplated his boots. He was aware of one Spicer. Rivers considered Spicer a "dreadful fellah" and a bore.

Spicer perceived the maneuver but was not resentful. He had observed that it was a way with swells. They shrank and glared if you clapped 'em on the back. God had made them thus. "Yet," Spicer argued, "bein' human, they must be human." He was on the point of ringing for a waiter and inviting Rivers to "name what 'e'd 'ave" when a tall, broad-shouldered man of thirty-five idled into the room. His blue eyes showed the habit of command. His nose was slightly aquiline, his chin and jaw well modeled and firm. He was a fine-looking man of Norman type and his rank was lieutenant-colonel. But it was obvious to Spicer that he was not "a swell." Spicer placed him as a colonial, though his uniform was British.

He watched him turn idly from the newspaper-table, glance about the room and discover Rivers's back. He saw the light of recognition kindle in his eyes. He saw him start impulsively, with the obvious design of surprising Rivers with a clap on the shoulder. Spicer knew what was coming. He could see Rivers's stare, hear his cold drawl expressive of aversion.

The stranger's pace quickened as he neared his unconscious victim. The next instant he was shaking Rivers by both shoulders. At this point Spicer's jaw dropped and he stared open-mouthed, for Rivers instead of withering his assailant, shouted joyously. "My God! It's old Pike!"

Scandalized, Spicer turned to his newspaper. For a moment he had thought they were going to kiss like Frenchmen. The last he saw of them, Rivers was leading the way to the greater privacy of the adjoining room.

"Well, you old swine," said Rivers affectionately. "I thought you were still in that Bournemouth hospital. I was going to hunt you up."

"You're on your way home, then?"

Rivers nodded. "It looks that way. Rather time—what?" His eye caught the calendar on the writing-table. It announced the day as March 18, 1919. "Getting on devilishly well toward five years. But what are you doin', son?"

"Got a job promised me in South Africa. Off next month. While they're waiting to demobilize me I thought I'd run over and look about; try to get track of my kit."

"I don't think a kit would bring me back, once I set foot in England and a free man," said Rivers. "Let this bloody kit go hang," he went on. "My boat is leavin' in an hour. I can get you aboard! You come back to London and stop with me. There's an extra room in Mount Street, and we'll have a spree. It's owin' us, son."

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"It listens good," said Pike. "Perhaps later in the week, but not to-day."

"Rubbish!" said Rivers.

"I've got to go out to the hospital; got a mystery on."

Rivers looked at him questioningly. "You're not going to let them go operating again?"

"No," said Pike. "This isn't medical. This is a—I don't know what you would call it." Laughing, he unbuttoned one of the breast pockets of his tunic and produced an envelope from which he took a slip of notepaper.

"What do you make of that?" he said, handing it to Rivers.

The half-dozen lines were written in pencil, in a woman's hand. It was the writing of a person of education. Rivers read: "You are being watched. You probably know why. This is all I can tell you, all I know." It was unsigned.

"I'll be damned!" observed Rivers. He looked at Pike.

"It means nothing to me," Pike said slowly. "As far as I know there's no more reason why I should be watched than you. I've never stolen anything. As far as I know I've got no past, and I know I've got no money."

"Have you any idea who wrote it?"

"Yes and no," Pike answered. "When I got to the hospital in England, this thing was found pinned on the shirt of my pajamas. The presumption is that it must have been the nurse out here at the base that got me ready to be evacuated."

"Would you know her again?"

"Yes, I would," said Pike. "I had one eye out of bandages. She was a very unusual-looking girl."

"Unusually good-looking?"

Pike nodded.

"It's a hundred to one it's a joke," said Rivers wisely. "Girl wants you to chase her."

"I've seen worse chasing," said Pike.

"Chuck it, son," said Rivers, "and go aboard with me. London's full of accommodating beauty these days."

Pike's gaze wandered off to the wall. For the moment he seemed unconscious of Rivers, unconscious of his surroundings. He was away, somewhere. Then with a little start he came back.

"Can't do it," he said. "Must look up my kit. Unless I'm mistaken, I've got it marked down at the hospital baggage-room."

A waiter put his head in the door and announced that an automobile was waiting for Colonel Pike.

Pike rose.

"You'll come on as soon as you can?" said Rivers.

"Sure thing!" said Pike, and went out.

Pike'scar drew up before the hospital, but Pike made no move to get out. He sat gazing off through the rain, his attitude that of a man listening; listening perhaps with the inner consciousness, rather than the ear.

The chauffeur glanced back at him, got down and ostentatiously opened the door. "We're blocking the road, sir," he said. "There's a general waiting for his car to drive up for him."

Pike came back from whatever regions he had been mentally exploring. "I see," he said vaguely. He got out and finding himself face to face with the general, saluted.

"Still solving Hun cyphers, eh, Pike?" said the general pleasantly.

Pike seemed to wake up. He laughed and grasped the general's extended hand. "Glad to see you, sir," he said heartily.

"Glad to see you," said the general. "Glad you're right again. Rotten luck to get it again just before the armistice."

Pike thanked him.

"Coddington tells me you're going out to the Cape to look after some mines," the general went on. "Wish we could keep you in the army."

"I'd like to stay," said Pike, "but the show's over and a man has to live."

"Of course," said the general. "I understand. The good ones are bound to leave us. Good luck to you."

Pike thanked him and went on toward the hospital offices.

The general's aide looked questioningly at his chief.

"You must know Pike," said the general. "V. C. at second battle of Ypres. Later on in the Intelligence."

"The fellow that worked out the German field code?"

The general nodded. "Amazin' piece of work. Amazin' fellow—plays chess blindfolded and that sort of thing."

While the general was getting into his car the aide turned and watched the celebrity disappear into the building.

A half-hour later Pike was still sitting in the visitors' waiting-room. He had fallen again into the same vacant, staring-into-space attitude in which he had arrived in his motor-car. A woman in a nurse's uniform bustled in and stood expectantly. Pike roused himself, regarded her doubtfully, rose and bowed.

"You weren't the head nurse here just before the armistice?" he demanded.

"No," she said. "I came in December. Did you want to see Miss Olgivie?"

"Olgivie? Yes, that was the name," Pike said thoughtfully. "No, it wasn't Miss Olgivie that I wanted to see. I wanted to ask her about some one who was here when I was."

"A patient?"

"A nurse."

"Is she here now?"

"I don't know. You see I was deaf and my head was in bandages, and before I could talk they evacuated me to England."

"What ward were you in?"

Pike told her.

The head nurse thought. "Those were all changed in January. The books would show where she was ordered. You'd better go to the adjutant's office."

"There's only one difficulty about that," said Pike. "I don't know her name."

The head nurse laughed. It was a situation not wholly new to her. "Well," she said, "if it's important, Colonel Pike ought to be able to find her if any one can."

Pike waved aside the compliment with a gesture that he had, a sort of jerk of the thumb. He regarded her with a whimsical gravity. "I need advice," he said. "Just how important would you say it was that I should find her?"

Her eyes twinkled. "On general principles," she answered, "I always say 'Don't.' There's enough trouble without looking for it."

"I reckon you're right," said Pike. "A head nurse always is."

They laughed together, shook hands and parted.

As Pike got into his automobile the wisdom of the head nurse's philosophy sank into him. Why run after trouble? He looked at his watch. Rivers's boat had sailed.

"Back to the club," he told the driver.

As he was ordering his lunch a note was brought to him. He tore open the envelope and read: "Just before leaving, received news by telegram that I want to consult you about. Join me in Mount Street as soon as possible. Rivers."

Pike smiled at Rivers's invention. "Well, why not?" he thought. London would be gay. He wanted to see old Rivers before he sailed for Capetown.

At six o'clock the next evening Pike was having tea in Rivers's flat.

"We'll dine at the Ritz," Rivers was saying, "have a go at the Palace; after that the evenin' and the world is ours. That agreeable?"

"Fine," said Pike.

"We're a bit elderly to go and make asses of ourselves," continued Rivers, "but after all, why not? We've all got troubles enough ahead. By the way," he added, "did you find that nurse you were looking for?"

Pike shook his head. "I got my kit, though. What's this that you wanted specially to talk over with me?"

"There's no use starting in about that tonight."

"Shoot!" said Pike. "That's what I'm here for."

"It's a weary tale," Rivers answered. "Old Blaughton's got the flu."

"Well, suppose he has?"

"Good God!" said Rivers sharply, "with both his sons killed, likewise my cousin Bertie, whose father was Blaughton's next younger brother, I'm next, don't you see?"

"You mean you'll die next?"

"Die? No. The bloody thing drops on me. I shall be Earl of Blaughton."

Pike began to shake. "Your troubles are heavy."

"Don't laugh, you silly ass," said Rivers angrily. "Here I am all comfortable, with a tidy little income, ready to settle down in a little box in a huntin' country and get married to a girl I rather like and this thing drops on me. Do you realize what it means?"

Pike was still shaking.

"It means I'm ruined. Blaughton's money goes to his daughters. I get Blaughton castle. I can't sell it, and it costs six thousand pounds a year to keep up."

Pike grew sober. "That is depressing," he said. "Do you like the place?"

"It's a lovely place," Rivers answered. "I was born there, but I can't live in it."

"Why not go to work?" asked Pike.

Rivers gazed at him in scorn. "Go to work!" he repeated.

"Who'd hire me? What am I good for? I need two hundred thousand pounds and I couldn't earn it in two thousand years."

Pike was silent. It was true. Yet Rivers was the man who had crawled three hundred yards over no-man's-land, extricated Pike out of German wire and somehow got him back to the British trenches. "We'll have to look into this," he said thoughtfully.

"For heaven's sake, forget it!" said Rivers. "We're on a spree."

"I don't mean to declare out on the spree," Pike observed cheerfully, "but this Blaughton tragedy interests me. Have you come to any decision as to what you'd better do?"

"Not the slightest," Rivers answered cheerlessly. "I told you I wanted your advice."

"Nobody can advise anybody," said Pike. "There's only one piece of advice that has any value and that is, follow your hunch."

Rivers looked at him mildly. "Follow my what?"

"Your hunch. You poor English nut, don't you know what hunch means?"

Rivers shook his head.

"It's a philosophy," said Pike. "Something tells you to do something or not to do something."

"Rubbish," said Rivers. "I do what I want to do."

"I do too, as a general thing," said Pike, "but that's the best way of putting a copper on the hunch."

Rivers lit a cigaret. "I think I had too much religion pumped into me when I was a boy," he said. "Everything that was pleasant was wrong. I chucked it."

"I never had any religion," said Pike. "I don't know that I'd call following hunches a religion. But according to my idea it's the simplest explanation of life."

Rivers smiled. "It's a pleasure to be taking tea with a man who has an explanation of life," he observed.

"Well, how are you going to explain things like what happened to McTavish?" Pike demanded.

"I don't see that it needs explaining," Rivers answered. "McTavish left his dugout and two minutes later a ten-inch shell dropped into it. There were a great many shells in that neighorbhood, also a great many dugouts with officers in them. It is not remarkable that McTavish should have left his dugout, or that it should have been hit. It is certainly no more remarkable than red coming up twenty-one times in succession. Of course, what McTavish says about it," Rivers added, "is of no value. He's a Highlander who sees a banshee almost daily."

"And yet—" Pike began.

"Excuse me," interrupted Rivers, "have you ever personally experienced one of these hunches, as you call them?"

"I've seen a Digger Indian find water when we were lost in the Arizona Desert," Pike answered. "That was the most remarkable thing I ever saw personally, but I'm not sure that my hitting on that code solution wasn't just as extraordinary."

Rivers smiled ironically. "Did it come to you in a dream?"

"No, but it was pretty much the same sort of thing. I was playing Rogers at chess. I was blindfolded. It was his move and I had him all but mated, so my mind strayed off the game, and the next thing I knew I saw that key word in German characters just as plain as I see you."

"Did you know it was the thing you had been looking for?"

"Sure," said Pike. "I beat it back to the office and tried it with some of the wireless messages we had there."

"That is interesting," Rivers observed, "but after all it's no more remarkable than a great many other things the subconscious mind does. You'd been working on this problem for several weeks and suddenly got the answer. There's no reason for supposing that any other intelligence than your own had anything to do with it."

"Only that it's a great deal easier and more reasonable," said Pike.

Rivers shot him an amused look. "My son," he said, "be content with your own amazin' genius and tell me how to make a million dollars or dodge this Blaughton business." He flung his cigaret at the fireplace and rose. "It's nearly seven," he added. "We'd better tub and change, as we're dinin' early."

Pike made no answer but followed him down the passage to his bedroom.

THERE was the usual half-past-eight crowd in the lobby of the Ritz. People coming in to dine; people who had dined going out to the play; people of the old "smart" pre-war London; people of the new-rich munitions set; soldiers, statesmen, famous beauties of both worlds, and all a little feverishly bent on the pleasures of peace.

Rivers turned away from the desk where theatre tickets were sold and looked about for Pike. Presently he marked him down by the entrance, arms folded, regarding the crowd with the unconscious, preoccupied gaze of a zoo lion. As Rivers approached he noted him and passed through the door which the porter opened.

"Depressing news," observed Rivers, pausing outside on the step. "Those beasts have let somebody else have our tickets; thought we weren't coming. Not another stall in the place." His look shifted suddenly over Pike's shoulder. "Turn slowly," he said. "There's an interesting-looking woman getting into a motor-car."

The door slammed and the car began to move as Pike turned. He had an instant's glance at her side face as the light was switched off.

Rivers saw him stiffen in surprise, start impulsively after the moving car, then check himself.

"Friend of yours?" he asked.

Pike laughed dryly. "That's the nurse I was telling you about."

Rivers opened his eyes and whistled. "I wouldn't mind being chased by that woman myself," he observed.

"You didn't notice the car number?"

Rivers shook his head.

"Nut that I am, I didn't, either."

"There was a man with her, wasn't there?"

"I can't be *sure* of it. All I'm sure of is that she was the nurse that got me ready to be evacuated. Why?"

"Oh, nothing!" Rivers answered, "only she doesn't look like the kind of woman who'd be pinning 'chase-me' notes on a wounded blighter's nightshirt. She wouldn't have to."

"Suppose you wanted to find her, how would you go to work about it?" Pike demanded.

Rivers smiled. "Barring hunches, I should say the best was to sit right here on these steps. There's something odd about London," he went on. "Every time I walk through Piccadilly I meet people whom I last saw at Nairobi or Tien Sien or Sandakkan, but I never meet any one that I see at my club. What nationality is that woman?" he added.

"I don't know," said Pike. "I never heard her speak."

"She looks more French than British," Rivers observed; "might be Viennese. Ordinarily I only like 'em blonde, but that clean, scrubbed-looking type of brown, with the blood showing through the skin and soft ungreasy black hair is very attractive. A man can't lay down a hard-and-fast rule about such things," he went on. "Experience with horses and women proves that the good ones come in all shapes, sizes and colors."

"Your views are interesting," said Pike, "but they don't get us anywhere."

"There's nothing you could do about her to-night," Rivers retorted. "Either she's decently married and going about with her own husband or she's not. If she'd wanted to recognize you, she'd have spoken to you as she went out. She passed right by you."

"She didn't see me," Pike answered hotly. "My back was turned."

"Of course she saw you," said Rivers, "saw you first, as you'd say. But that is neither here nor there, old son. The question is, what are we going to do? Shall we drop in at the Empire, or try to find places at one of the less meritorious plays?"

Before Pike answered an officer in unifrom came out of the hotel and nodded to Rivers.

"Hello, Tink!" said Rivers. "Pike, you know Tinkham?"

"I think I used to see you at Third Corps headquarters," said Pike.

Tinkham nodded. "Glad to see you fit," he said. "Rotten luck to get wiped again just before the thing ended."

"It might have been worse," Pike mumbled.

"We were wondering what we were going to do till the evening begins," said Rivers. "Those creatures at the Ritz sold our seats at the Palace. Do you want to hunt up a show with us?"

"Can't," said Tinkham. "I'm investigating spooks."

"You're not bit with that thing?" said Rivers.

"I am not," said Tinkham, "but some of my family are. I'm trying to put a stop to it."

"It ain't that woman in Clarjes Street that my aunt goes to to see about Bertie?" asked Rivers.

"That's the one," said Tinkham.

"She ought to be locked up."

"That's what I think."

"But what can you do about it?"

"I'm going to try to catch her faking and turn her over to the police. Why don't you come along?"

"Pike believes in this thing," said Rivers.

Tinkham turned to Pike. "Do you know anything about this medium business?"

Pike shook his head. "I've never been to one of them. It's interested me, though."

"Don't you believe in it?" said Rivers.

"I don't disbelieve in it," Pike answered. "One doesn't know very much about anything. In principle I'm inclined to accept it, as the diplomats say."

"It's rot," said Rivers. "Mawkish generalities, at two guineas a portion."

"Do you know anything about it first-hand?" Pike demanded. "Ever been to a séance?"

"I went once," Rivers answered, "with my aunt. Bertie Rivers was on the wire telling us he was happy and helping others who had just 'come over.' He was done in at Messines. Most unlikely conduct on Bertie's part, I thought."

"Why don't you come?" said Tinkham. "I've a sitting at nine. I'd really like to have your help. Pelton was coming with me, but he's gone to the country."

Rivers looked at Pike.

"I'm willing," Pike said. "We'll be finished by ten. We can look in at the Empire afterward if you like."

"Well," said Rivers, "I don't mind, but I never could bear Bertie Rivers in life and I don't want him talking to me now he's dead."

"You'll have to bear that," said Tinkham, "as she'll naturally remember you. Pike's the only one of us she doesn't know. That's why it's good to have him along."

"All right then," said Rivers resignedly, "but it's a bad way of beginning an evening."

As they walked down Piccadilly, Tinkham expounded a plan of action. During the writing he was to take the notes. Rivers was to watch the medium's feet and Pike was to keep an eye out for anything that might turn up. In case there should be materializations, at the word from Tinkham, Rivers was to turn up the gas, Pike to seize the woman and Tinkham the ghost.

Turning into Clarjes Street, Tinkham stopped before one of a row of houses devoted to respectable lodgings and rang the bell. A maid opened the door and showed them into the parlor fronting on the street. It was furnished in a comfortable middle-class Victorian fashion. The window-shades were drawn, as were heavy curtains. A four-legged library table of rosewood stood in the center of the room, under the chandelier, two jets of which were lighted. Four chairs with hair-cloth seats and rosewood frames stood about the table. Glass-fronted bookcases stood on either side of the fireplace, and the walls were hung with engravings popular in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Almost immediately a tired-looking woman, with faded brown eyes and hair streaked with gray, entered from the back room. She received them undemonstratively and seated herself at the table. "Kindly extinguish one burner," she said, "and turn down the other."

Pike, who was the tallest, carried out her instructions. While the room was dim it was possible to distinguish objects and to write in a large hand.

Then the three seated themselves, Tinkham opposite her, Pike on her right, and Rivers on her left.

"With whom do you wish to communicate?" she asked Tinkham.

"Well," he said, "we might begin on Captain Adelbert Rivers if that's agreeable?"

Rivers scowled.

The woman nodded assent. "Put your hands on the table. Rest them lightly. See, like mine," she directed. She closed her eyes for a moment, opened them and held them fixed on the table.

Four or five minutes passed in silence, then the table began to rock softly.

"Is Adelbert Rivers there?" she asked in a weary, matter-of-fact voice.

Pike smiled. It was like a tired telephone operator making a call.

A distinct thump followed, caused by one of the table legs lifting and striking the floor. Pike looked at Tinkham. Rivers had his eyes under the table. Of course it was a trick, but he failed to see how it was done.

"Have you anything to send through?" asked the medium in the same perfunctory tone.

Another thump.

"One means yes," Tinkham whispered, "three means no."

"Kindly repeat the alphabet and check the letters," said the medium.

Tinkham began, A-B-C. As he came to T there was a thump. He wrote T with the pencil and began again. Laboriously the word "tell" was spelled, then the word "the." At the end of ten minutes he had the words, "Tell the mater everything is ripping. Don't make a fuss. Good-night." After that the table was quiet again.

"Bertie never was garrulous," Rivers whispered.

"Is any one else there?" the woman demanded.

Five minutes passed in silence.

"I don't think we'll be successful," she said wearily. "The conditions seem bad."

"Well," said Tinkham, "we don't wish to trouble you, madam, but I was hoping——"

"Wait," she interrupted.

She threw herself back in her chair, a convulsive movement ran through her body and her eyes closed. A moment later she began in the shrill high-pitched tones of a child: "This is Lucy. There's a man here who wants somebody. He's an elderly man, all browned and sunburned. His hair is gray. He has kind eyes and a nice smile. I see a W., W. for William. I see an L. L. L. LA. LA. S., S-S—Lassiter. Is that it?"

Tinkham, who had been writing, stopped. "She's got the wrong number," whispered Rivers.

Pike was sitting forward with a queer look on his face.

"Go on!" he said. "Lassiter's right. Take the message."

"That's right," the child's voice continued. "He says there's trouble about something— Oh, yes, about a mine. John must go to New York. He must sail the twenty-seventh on the— I see an S. S-P. It's something like Spart. He says, 'Tell John he didn't kill himself. It was very strange. John must look out. There's danger. John must find the mine and the money. I see a great deal of money, yellow bars in a little room, a closet. William says find the wax cylinder, it's very important. He says look out for somebody, a man, I can't get the name—the power is weak. That's all. William says he's happy. Good night, John."

The voice stopped. The woman lay back still.

Pike sat staring at her.

"Does this mean anything to you?" asked Tinkham.

"I'll tell you when we get out," Pike answered.

"We ought to do something for this woman," said Rivers.

"It's nothing, they're always like this," Tinkham answered. As he spoke she opened her eyes, sighed deeply and wiped her face with her handkerchief. She lay still for several minutes. Rivers brought her a glass of water from the stand and she sat up.

"I'm tired," she said weakly. "Did anything come through?"

"Yes," said Pike. "It was all right. We'll go now."

Tinkham looked doubtfully at Rivers, who shrugged his shoulders. No palpable trickery had been discovered. They both looked at Pike. Pike made a gesture toward the door.

Tinkham laid the fee on the table, gathered the notes he had taken and they went out.

A taxi passed, slowed down and waited. "Thanks, we're walking," said Rivers. He turned to Pike. "Well," he said, "what did you make of it?"

For the moment Pike made no reply. He was gazing vacantly at the street-lamp.

"Do you know any one named Lassiter?" asked Tinkham.

Pike nodded. "Yes," he said. "I'm John Lassiter."

A low "Good God!" came from Rivers.

Tinkham looked from one to the other. Then he thrust the notes into Rivers's hand and swung off toward Piccadilly. "See you chaps later on," he called back.

IT WAS quarter to ten by the clock on Rivers's mantelpiece. The soft-coal fire had crackled into a blaze. A parrot in a cage, covered with a piece of old embroidery, was mumbling sleepily.

"You know how it was in fourteen," Pike was saying. He gulped down what was left of his whisky and soda. "An American who enlisted had to be a Canadian and take an assumed name. Well, I became J. B. Pike. As far as I know there isn't a human being in Europe who knew that I wasn't."

"On the face of it, it's certainly extraordinary," said Rivers. "And she was right about the *Spartic* sailing on the twenty-seventh, though any one could have found that out." He tossed his cigaret into the fire and watched it as it caught in the lighted coals. "And yet," he went on, "the possibilities of fraud are enormous. Suppose there should be something in that note the girl pinned on you? Do you see what I mean?"

"I see what you mean," said Pike. "If there's been some funny business one could read some reason into the note, but it doesn't explain what happened in Clarjes Street. The last thing a crook would do would be to put me wise to what was going on. Besides, no one knew that we were going to the woman. We didn't know ourselves till we met Tinkham."

"That's all true," Rivers conceded, "yet it's a hundred to one the thing's a fake; a clever one, I admit."

"It's a good thing to remember," said Pike, "that the best thought of the day put thumb-screws on Galileo for insisting that the earth was round. It was a shock to people to find out that the earth went round the sun; that instead of being the center of the universe it was a speck in one of billions of solar systems. Also it's rather a shock to consider the possibility of our three-dimensional world being at the beginning of things instead of at the end, but there's nothing unreasonable about it."

"That's all right," said Rivers, "but this communicating is a different matter."

"It may be, or it may all depend on the development of a sense that is still rudimentary," said Pike. "There must have been the first time when the pigment spot on the head of the prehistoric saurian became sensitive to light. Prior to that there were no eyes. All living creatures were ignorant of the existence of light, but it was there. Have you ever played this game of willing some one who comes into the room to do something?"

Rivers nodded.

"Well," Pike went on, "it all seems to me a good deal like that game. Here we are surrounded by unseen intelligences trying to get their thoughts to us, trying to make us go this way or that. For the most part we blunder along dumbly, but every now and then some one gets a flash and then everybody thinks it's a joke or a coincidence or a fraud."

"It's a pretty theory," said Rivers. "But, unfortunately, every time you test it you end up against a faker making two guineas a shot out of it. Where it isn't downright fraud it's mind-tapping. Now, in this case, what did the woman tell you that you didn't know, or might have known? You knew your name; you knew your father was dead; you never had any reason to suppose that he'd killed himself; you say that he'd written you something about the sale of a mine. Now, what is there left?"

"I didn't know that the *Spartic* was sailing on the twenty-seventh——"

"She might easily have known that," Rivers put in.

"I didn't know anything about a wax cylinder. I don't now."

"Well, that's something to be investigated," Rivers admitted "It may be interesting to be told to go hunting for a wax cylinder, but does it mean anything? Let's go over the matter and see what we have to go on."

"As I told you," Pike began, "my father and I were mining engineers and prospectors. In July, 1914, we were coming to Europe for a vacation. The end of June I was in Idaho; father was in Arizona. We were to meet in New York. A few days before we were to sail I got a wire from him saying I was to go on and he'd meet me in London. He'd run across something big that he'd have to put through before he left. Father was always thinking he'd struck a bonanza, so I didn't lose any sleep about it. Well, I decided to sail, because if I didn't I'd never get him away, and he needed a rest. I got to London on the twenty-fifth of July.

"On the twenty-seventh I got a cable from our lawyer in New York saying father was dead. He'd fallen out of a window at his hotel. I cabled for particulars. The lawyer didn't know anything except what was in the papers. Father was supposed to have gone to the window, had heart failure, and fallen out."

"Did you go home?"

"No. There wasn't anything I could do. Father was dead and buried. Everything we had was either in mining stocks or in cash in the bank to our joint account. Besides, with the war breaking out that week one wasn't thinking much about business. The fourth of August I got a letter from him written from New York the day before he died. It said we were rich, that he had bought an abandoned mine for a few hundred dollars and had uncovered a bonanza vein. He was going to sell a half interest to New York parties for a million and then join me in London. I figured this way. If the money was there, our lawyer would look after it. If the old boy had been having one of his dreams, there was nothing to be done."

"Did the lawyer find anything?"

"Nothing that bore on a big sale. It seems father had telephoned him that he was coming in to see him the next day, that is the day after he died. That was the first the lawyer knew that he was in New York."

Rivers lit a fresh cigaret and smoked in silence. Finally he said: "Suppose your father did find a big mine, suppose he made the sale as he wrote he was going to do, is there any way of tracing the property?"

"There might be and there might not," Pike answered. "If he bought an abandoned mine, he must have got a deed, but there's no knowing whether he would have recorded it before he made the sale. I don't even know what state it was in. If he made the sale and was robbed, they've had four years to cover up their tracks. It doesn't look very promising."

Rivers took the sheets on which Tinkham had made his notes from the table and began looking through them. A few moments later he tossed them on the table again. "I can't say I think very much of this revelation as a guide to stolen treasures," he said. "Apparently a wax cylinder is the key to the mystery, but we are given no hint as to its whereabouts. Why is it the spirits are always doing things half-way?"

Pike laughed. "Are you sailing with me on the *Spartic?*" he asked.

Rivers regarded him quizzically. "Do you think two lunatics would be better than one?"

"It's your chance to make your million dollars," Pike went on.

Rivers laughed.

"I mean it," said Pike. "It's a hunch. You understand, it's fifty-fifty."

"Fifty-fifty?" Rivers repeated.

"Share and share alike. I need your help. If we win, you'll have earned it."

"My son," said Rivers, "all the money that lies at the end of this excursion one will be able to put through the eye of a needle. However, I shall request Roberts to engage two passages on the *Spartic.*"

Pike said nothing, but he rose and, standing behind Rivers's chair, placed both hands on his shoulders.

A sudden idea seemed to strike Rivers. "By Jove!" he said. "This won't do, though, will it? You're not J. B. Pike at all. I can't travel with an impostor."

"I was thinking of that myself," said Pike. "However, we'd better keep J. B. going till the end of the chapter. Otherwise I'd never get out of England. All my papers are in his name and my passport will have to be issued to him."

"That being the case," said Rivers, "I may be able to stretch a point. What do you say to bed?"

"You can't make me mad by suggesting bed," said Pike.

"You're getting old," said Rivers. "You're just as relieved at getting rid of this spree as I am."

LATE in the afternoon of the twenty-seventh the *Spartic* worked out of the Mersey in the teeth of a westerly gale. About six, Rivers came down to the stateroom where Pike was unpacking.

"She's going to be one of these rollin' arks," he observed. He braced himself and lighted a cigaret. "However, as you Americans say—I shouldn't worry."

Pike regarded him hopelessly. "Should, not shouldn't."

"But there's no sense in sayin' 'I should worry,' " said Rivers.

Pike went on arranging his shaving-kit.

"I've been doing a bit of a scout," Rivers continued. "Found out where we're going to sit. Table seventeen for four. You and I, a chap named Boyd and a female, Adams or Sinclair, or something similar."

"Wonder why they put a woman with us?"

"Give it up. The ship's pretty full, though. We're lucky not to be sandwiched in with a mob. I do hate eatin' at a big mess."

At seven, while they were walking the deck, the dinner call sounded. They took another turn and went to the saloon.

As they approached table seventeen Pike's gaze fastened on the man already seated. He was a powerfully made man, approaching sixty, prosperous-looking, with deep-set, keen eyes, and an expression of alert good humor. He looked up and nodded.

"I suppose one of you gentlemen is Colonel Pike," he said, "and the other Major Rivers. I've been rubbering at the cards. My name is Boyd. I'm from New York."

They explained themselves and sat down.

Pike glanced at the empty seat. "Our lady," he said, "doesn't seem to have shown up."

"The sea," observed Boyd, "is a state of mind. I've known women that were obliged to disappear with the first turn of the screw. Presumably Miss Crewe belongs to that unhappy category. However, it is blowing."

"Crewe, that's it," said Rivers, as if making a mental observation.

Boyd looked at him curiously but said nothing.

The waiter had appeared with a champagne cooler. "I had some champagne sent me just before I sailed," said Boyd. "It's got to be drunk because it can't be taken ashore. I trust you'll do me the honor to help me?"

"If you put it that way, as a matter of philanthropy—" said Rivers. His eye had caught the label.

"More glasses," Boyd said to the waiter, "and have two quarts ready every night."

"To a prosperous voyage," he said, as the glasses were filled, "and," he added to Rivers, "to the king." He turned to Pike. "Are you an Englishman?"

"Canadian," Pike answered shortly.

"Then," said Boyd, "turn about, we'll have the president, the king and the maple-leaf."

"Not a bad fellow that Boyd," observed Rivers as they went on deck. "1904 Krug is devilish hard to find these days. He tells a good story, too. Business fellow—what?"

"I should think so from what he said."

"Seems inclined to be uncommon civil. We might have fallen in with worse."

Pike made no comment. He stood leaning on the rail gazing vacantly off into the darkness.

"Listening to the fishes?" asked Rivers after a pause.

"You don't get any reaction to this Boyd except that he's a good fellow?" said Pike abruptly.

Rivers looked at him perplexed. "Reaction? What do you mean?"

"You're not one of these people who can tell when there's a cat in the room?"

"Not unless I can see it."

"Neither can I," said Pike; "but sometimes I get impressions. Now, I wouldn't trust Boyd. If I had to bet, I'd bet there was a crooked streak in him."

"I fancy most of these business fellows have crooked streaks in 'em," said Rivers. "But to me he seems an uncommon, straightforward sort of chap. Anyhow, he's nothing to us and his fizz is royal."

They drifted aft to the smoking-room and a moment later Boyd came in lighting a cigar.

"Are you gentlemen bridge-players?" he asked.

"I play a bit," Rivers answered, "but don't ask Pike. I had him for a partner once and he trumped a good ace."

"It's true about the ace," Pike said, laughing.

"Chess is his game," Rivers went on. "He's a marvel; plays three games blindfolded."

Boyd listened with interest. "Chess is supposed to be my accomplishment," he said, "but I can't do anything like that. Still, if you'd like to play?"

"I'd be glad to play," Pike answered, "but you mustn't believe Rivers. I'm fair, that's all."

Boyd ordered chessmen and took a table in the corner. Here Rivers left them setting the board and cut into a four at bridge.

It was after midnight when he got up from the card-table. He went out on deck to fill his lungs with air and found Pike leaning against the rail.

"Well," he said, "how did the chess go?"

"All right," said Pike. "He's not very strong, but he seems to enjoy playing with me. We got the odds straightened out after a game or two and it went better."

"Still think he's a crook?"

"A chicken is made up of light meat, dark meat and feathers," Pike answered enigmatically. "Boyd's got his share of dark."

"Did he try to ring in an extra queen?"

"You can be crooked even at chess, if you want to," said Pike. "It all depends what you're after."

"And what does that mean?"

"It means this," Pike answered. "In the first game, before he was sure I could play, I gave him two chances to mate. He didn't take either of them."

"Perhaps he didn't see them?"

"He saw them. He plays better than the average."

"But what would he have to gain by throwing the match? What is he after?"

"I don't know, but I have an idea that he didn't want to discourage me."

"Kind heart."

Pike laughed. "Your friend Boyd acts to me very much as if he wanted to cultivate my acquaintance."

"Why shouldn't he? You're an attractive young man."

Pike ignored this. "The odd thing about it is that while I think he's a crook I like him," he went on. "He can play chess with me all the way to New York if he wants to."

"You can overdo this hunch business," said Rivers. "They were talking about Boyd at my card-table. He's a member of a reputable firm of stock-brokers, belongs to good clubs and is accounted a thoroughly good sort."

"I'm sure I'm glad to hear it," Pike answered, and the conversation stopped.

Whether Boyd's enthusiasm for chess was genuine or inspired by ulterior motives was still an open question, even in Pike's mind, at the end of five uneventful days. It was only certain that he was an enthusiast. Morning, afternoon and evening, whenever Pike entered the smoking-room Boyd was there, ready.

"You mustn't do this if it bores you," he said laughing. "I'm insatiable. For the last two or three years I haven't played, and I think it's a cumulative appetite that's breaking out like an aggravated thirst."

"Same here," said Pike. "I enjoy it." And he did.

Boyd's play improved with practise. With the odds Pike gave him he had to play his best to win. Between games they talked. Boyd's ideas on Europe's problems of reconstruction were intelligent and well expressed. The man talked well. At times he spoke frankly of personal matters, yet one thing Pike noted. He never asked personal questions. To Pike, with his first impression of Boyd always in the back of his mind, it seemed as if he overdid his reticence in this respect. There were questions that it would have been proper as well as natural to have asked, questions regarding Pike's personal experience with the war which Rivers's use of his title of "colonel" might well have prompted. If Boyd were making an effort to study him, he was doing it most circumspectly.

When Pike asked himself to what end Boyd could be working if this were his object, he had no definite answer. Toward the end he inclined to the opinion that Boyd, who was evidently a man of large and varied interests, was scrutinizing him with reference to offering him some position that he had to fill. And yet Boyd never sounded him as to his qualifications in any special direction, never even inquired as to his profession.

The sixth day out the succession of gales which had buffeted the *Spartic* ceased and the weather came off fair and calm. Pike put in the evening with Boyd at the chess-board and a little before midnight went to his cabin. He was in bed when Rivers came in.

"You asleep?" began Rivers.

"No," was the answer.

"I meant to tell you something this afternoon, but I forgot."

"Well?"

"You remember that girl I pointed out to you in the motor-car in front of the Ritz?"

"You mean the nurse?"

"Yes. Well, what of her?"

"She's on board."

Pike sat up in his bunk.

"I was coming along the port side and there she was sittin' in the sun in a steamer-chair. Damned fine-looking woman."

"Go on," said Pike.

Rivers looked at him quizzically. "How did you know there was any more to it?"

"Don't be a damned fool."

"Well," continued Rivers, "I went on to what one might call a respectful distance, then I went to the rail and looked around. Who do you suppose I saw come up to her and give her a book?"

"I can't guess."

"Boyd."

"Boyd?" Pike repeated.

"Exactly," said Rivers. "Beholding a

friend, I went back, nodded to him and was properly presented. You're a sly devil, Pike. I believe you've been holding her hand at odd moments ever since we sailed."

Pike had kicked back the bedclothes and was sitting crosswise in the upper berth, his legs hanging over the side. "Why have you buttoned this up all day?" he demanded.

Rivers's eyes met those of his friend. The banter had gone out of them. "To tell the truth," he said, "I wanted time to think. It's damned odd."

Pike made no comment.

"You get a so-called spirit message," Rivers went on, "telling you to sail in a certain ship and hunt for a stolen treasure. The first man you meet excites your suspicions. Now a woman who you think sent you a warning note turns up traveling with the man. It all fits together. Spirit communication seems proved."

"What are you driving at?" said Pike.

"Just this," said Rivers. "Something strange is undoubtedly going on and Boyd is mixed up in it; but the first round goes against the Clarjes Street woman. I mean by that we don't have to bring spirits into the explanation just yet."

Rivers paused and lit a cigaret. "This evening," he continued, "as we came out from dinner I tipped the second steward a sovereign. Boyd's Krug, I dare say. I said, 'Steward, you've made us very comfortable; glad you put us at the same table with Mr. Boyd.' He looked a bit taken back at that. 'I can't claim credit for that,' said he. 'Mr. Boyd came aboard the morning we sailed and gave particular directions that you and Colonel Pike were to be seated with him.'"

Pike whistled softly.

"Thus," said Rivers, "instead of being supernormally induced to sail in the *Spartic*, for the purpose of meeting Boyd, it appears that he sailed in her for the purpose of meeting us."

"Have it any way you like," said Pike dryly. "Do you know what relation the girl is to Boyd?"

"He introduced her as his niece. Odd that he's never mentioned her. Still——"

Pike rolled back into the bunk and pulled the bedclothes over him.

"I say," said Rivers, "aren't you overdoing this Olympian calm? I don't mind saying for myself that I was thoroughly well surprised. What do you think of it?"

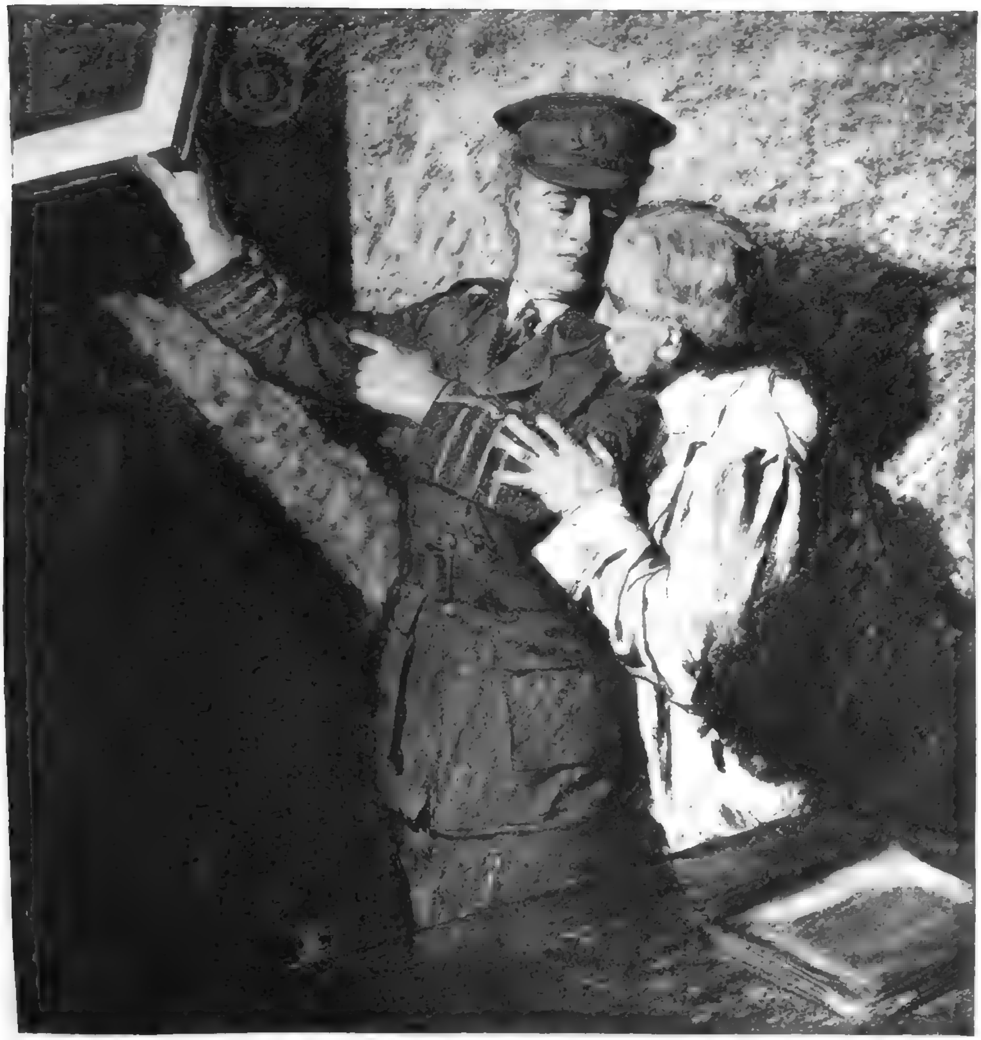
"I'll tell you to-morrow," Pike answered.

Ten minutes later Rivers shut off the light and was presently asleep, but when Pike last looked at his wrist-watch with the luminous dial it was quarter past three. He had done some thinking in those three hours.

At nine the next morning Pike was on deck. It was one of those cloudless, glittering days that follows periods of storm. The swell had fallen with the wind. The offshore gulls from the western continent had picked them up and were wheeling overhead. Pike stationed himself on the starboard side, under cover of a ventilator, and watched the companionway. A little before ten he saw Boyd come out and glance about, looking for him doubtless, then go aft along the port side to the smoking-room. As he expected, Boyd appeared again shortly and made the circuit of the deck. Pike could have touched him as he passed. For the time being Boyd was a man he wished to avoid. Boyd passed but the once and Pike knew that he had gone back to the smoking-room to set the chess-board and wait.

A quarter of an hour later a woman emrged from the companionway with a rug over her arm. She stood for a few moments gazing off to sea. It was the woman who had nursed him at Boulogne; the woman he had seen enter the limousine at the Ritz. There could be no doubt about it. There was the same amazing, golden skin, with the color shining through; the same high-bred features; the same rather haughty carriage of the little head on the supple body. As she moved, it brought back the pictures Pike had in his mind of her passing through the ward. She had never seemed tired. Always the easy, gliding step of youth, and a frame perfectly put together, always the grave, whimsical smile, the ready lighting up of her gray eyes. And there was the same original bloom still with her that Pike had lain and thought about at Boulogne, betokening emotional depths that had never been stirred. There was no doubt it was she.

She filled her lungs with the tonic air and turning to the port deck disappeared from view. Pike gave her three minutes to get settled in her chair, then followed. As he approached, he saw a book lying open in her lap. Her gaze apparently was fixed on



"The switch I find under the desk. And here"—he rose and swung back the engraving from the wall—"is evidently the receiving mechanism."

the sea. He raised his hat and said, "Good morning!"

A pair of gray eyes met his steadily, without surprise, without resentment, but equally without recognition. "Good morning!" she answered.

In his forecast of the interview that he had planned, Pike had anticipated a number of varying possibilities, but not this. If she were an actress, she was amazing. If she were not acting, an extraordinary mistake had occurred.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I took you for a nurse who was at the hospital at Boulogne just before the armistice."

"I was there as a nurse at that time."

"I was a patient in your ward, Lieutenant-Colonel Pike."

The name seemed to mean nothing. She smiled gravely. "I'm sorry," she said. "You see there were so many."

"I wonder if I could recall myself," Pike suggested. "Head in bandages, couldn't hear, couldn't talk, one of the last cases the night before the armistice."

She shook her head regretfully. "You're sure it was I?"

"Yes. There was a subaltern in the next

bed who was blind and you used to read his letters to him."

A flash of recollection came into her eyes. "A boy named Cobham. I remember. And you were in the bed next?"

"Toward the door."

Her brows knitted in the effort of memory. "There was a double amputation there, but that was in early October. You must have taken his place."

"I came in the tenth. For nearly three weeks you fed me with a tube."

"I begin to remember now," she said, but without conviction. "It's strange, isn't it?"

He smiled. "I'd hardly say that. There are people who make absolutely no impression on me." He saw her glance shift as if something behind him had attracted her attention, and the next moment he felt a touch on his arm.

"I've been searching the ship for you," said Boyd. "Thought you'd gone overboard. So you've deserted me for my niece? Can't say I blame you."

"He says he was one of my patients at Boulogne," said the girl, "and I can't remember him. Isn't it awful?"

"Rather awful for me," said Pike.

Boyd stood smiling. "Well," he said, "are you going to play chess or continue as an exhibit for identification?"

"I think my best chance is chess," Pike laughed. "We can go on with the identification later." He lifted his cap and bowed.

The girl met his eyes boldly with an inscrutable challenging look and he turned and followed Boyd. Before they reached the smoking-room half a minute later, Pike had made a decision. The girl was acting as well as Boyd. The explanation was that Boyd was the man, or one of the men, who had robbed his father. The girl had written the note and had afterward repented of it. He had no proof, but he was certain of it. It was a hunch.

The chess-board in the corner was ready with the pieces set, as Pike had anticipated. They sat down and Pike began mechanically to play. When Boyd's eyes were fixed on the game, Pike studied him. Doubtless when Pike's eyes were on the board Boyd was in a similar fashion studying him. Behind the wall of bone that was Boyd's skull were registered mysteriously the things that Pike wished to know. It was possible that the same thought was in Boyd's mind regarding Pike's own cranium. Boyd must want to know how much Pike knew, how much he suspected; how much his father's papers had furnished a clue to the transaction of the mine. He could imagine Boyd's perplexity. The fact that for four years he had taken no steps to trace his father's property would raise the presumption that he was ignorant of its existence. Yet Boyd was taking no chances. He had ferreted out his presence in the army under the name of Pike and once the war was ended had picked up his trail again. It indicated the magnitude of the stakes he was playing for, not only treasure but reputation and liberty. Presumably Boyd knew that his plans had been laid to go to South Africa and had been content. Then suddenly he had taken passage for New York. Consternation had seized him. Boyd, who was certainly no mere agent, had taken the case up himself.

All this Pike could reconstruct as he moved the pieces on the board before him, but where did the girl come in? On the face of it she was a confederate. But his theory that she had written the note and then repented of it seemed far-fetched. Why should she have warned him in the first place? It was possible, of course, that the note was not hers. In that case who did write it and pin it to him? What would have been the motive? But for that matter, if the note had indeed been written by Mary Crewe, what was her motive? Thus the inquiry led around in circles.

So also the question of her refusal to recognize him. It was unlikely that a woman could have nursed a man as she had nursed Pike for three weeks and have utterly forgotten him four months afterward. If she were Boyd's confederate, why had she warned him? If she were not, why had she pretended to forget him? A hopeless tangle it seemed, yet the explanation of her actions must be bound up in the explanation of Boyd's, and that was the matter in hand. He had one thing in his favor: Boyd probably had no suspicion of Pike's suspicion of Boyd.

A plan of action began to shape itself. He must take chances, but the chances he resolved to take involved no serious consequences if he lost. Sooner or later Boyd must discover that he was on the trail of the treasure even if at present it were only his surmise. What harm could come of his assuring Boyd on that point? It would have the advantage of misleading Boyd as to Pike's suspicions of him, and he would get Boyd's reaction to the narrative. Besides, he could tell Boyd the truth, yet not necessarily the whole truth. It ought not to be difficult, for this was what Boyd had come aboard the *Spartic* to find out.

He was roused from his meditations by Boyd's quick and triumphal move of his queen across the board. A glance showed the situation. Pike smiled. "That's mate, all right," he said. "Time for another?"

Boyd glanced at the clock. "I doubt it," he answered. "Besides, I'd rather enjoy my victory. You'd beat me next time. Great game, chess."

"It is," said Pike, "yet I fancy you business men have a better one."

"Business is absorbing," Boyd admitted. He looked thoughtfully at the ash on his cigar and broke it off in the ash-tray.

"Aren't you a business man?"

Pike smiled inwardly. It was the first personal question that Boyd had ever asked. "No," he answered casually. "I was a mining engineer. I suppose I still am for that matter, but nearly five years of war puts a man out of things."

"I've got some mining interests in Mexico," Boyd said thoughtfully. "You're not looking for a job?"

"No, not just at present," Pike answered. His gaze strayed off through the open window over the waste of glittering sea. "I've got rather a curious problem ahead of me," he said, bringing his eyes back to Boyd. "I'd like your advice."

Boyd was putting the chessmen back in the box. "All right," he said, "you shall have it." He went on replacing the pieces.

"Well," said Pike carelessly, "what would you do if you had a gold-mine that had disappeared?"

Boyd looked up at him and laughed.

"I'm not joking," Pike answered. "Just before the war broke out my father wrote me that he had struck a rich vein in an abandoned mine that he had bought. It was so remarkable a proposition that he sold a half interest for a millions dollars. He died immediately afterward, suddenly, and when his estate was settled there was no trace of the million, no trace of the half that he retained, neither the original deed nor anything to certify ownership of it."

"But the people he sold to ought to know about the original deed," said Boyd.

"But I don't know who they are," said Pike.

Boyd never batted an eyelash. "That of course complicates matters," he said thoughtfully. "Still there are two obviously possible explanations. The lawyer who settled the estate might have made away with it, probably did, if it's as you tell it. Then, of course, there's the possibility that your father might have sold the remaining half as well. You say he died suddenly about that time. He might have sold and never have written you about it."

"But in that case," Pike said, "oughtn't the money for it to have been in his estate?"

"I should think so," Boyd answered. A startled look had come into his eyes. "Do you mean it wasn't in his estate?"

"Not a dollar of it. The million dollars he got for the half that I know he sold vanished like the mine."

Boyd's jaw dropped. He sat staring at Pike, amazement, surmise, apprehension in his eyes. It was not acting. Pike was sure of that. The man had heard something that he had not known, had not suspected, something that frightened him. A moment later he had himself in hand again.

"That is very extraordinary," he was saying. "Who was the lawyer that settled the estate?"

"I have absolute confidence in the lawyer," Pike answered. "Besides conceding that he might have forged a transfer of the deed, how could he have got away with the check?"

"Just what do you mean?" Boyd asked.

"If my father sold a half interest for a million dollars," Pike answered, "he must have received one or more checks for the amount. Now if he had been robbed after his death no bank would have cashed them with a genuine indorsement, let alone a forged one. If he had been robbed before, he would have notified the bank to stop payment."

"Suppose he had been paid in securities," said Boyd, "government bonds?"

Pike shot him a quick look and Boyd's eyes shifted. "I never thought of that," Pike said.

"It would have simplified things for a crooked lawyer," said Boyd.

"Not very much in this case," said Pike. "My father had a safe-deposit box. He never would have taken a million dollars' worth of negotiable bonds to a hotel with him. That box was opened in the presence of officials from the surrogate's office and there were no bonds there."

"If he died at his hotel, as you suggest," said Boyd, "the hotel servants might have robbed him."

"That too is improbable, for the reason that the police had to break in the door of his room. They took charge of everything in his effects. They turned over nearly a thousand dollars in cash, his watch and valuables. It's unlikely that they would have taken a packet of bonds or a deed to a mine even if such things had been there, for it would have been a million to one that an inquiry would have at once been made for them. But if they had been dishonest they might very well have taken his cash and watch; and they didn't."

Boyd puffed at his cigar, his brows knit in perplexity. "I judge from what you say that your father died in his room at this hotel?" he said.

"He died in the street," said Pike shortly. "He fell from the window."

"Heart failure, I suppose. One of my best friends went that way. Such things are very shocking."

"Well," said Pike after a silence, "if you had a problem like mine ahead of you what would you do?"

"I'm damned if I know," Boyd answered. "It's the most extraordinary story I ever heard. I want to think about it before I volunteer advice. By the way," he added, "if you knew all this in 1914 why did you never do anything about it before?"

"There was a war that began about that time," Pike answered. "Besides," he added confidentially, "there's a good deal that I have done. There's a friend of mine in the West, who, I believe, knows the mine that my father bought. Once I find out in whose name it stands the investigation will be simplified."

"Yes, that ought to help a good deal," said Boyd. He sucked nervously at his cigar and rang the bell. "I'm going to have a drink," he announced. "Make me a dry martini," he said to the waiter. "What will you have, Pike?"

Pike shook his head. "Nothing, thank you. I think I'll get a breath of air."

"Wait a minute," said Boyd insistently, "and I'll go along with you. You know, Pike," he went on, "that story you've just told me has taken hold of me in an unaccountable way. I didn't suppose a thing like that could happen in these days."

"I don't think these days are very unlike any other days," Pike answered.

The cocktail came. Boyd gulped it down and rose. "Let's have a look at the market," he said. "The wireless ought to be up."

They walked forward, past Miss Crewe. Her eyes were on her book. She made no sign as they passed, and Boyd seemed unconscious of her.

He led the way into the companionway where the ships' notices were posted and put on his glasses.

"Steel up two and a half points," he observed. "Market's strong. You'll make money buying anything." He murmured half a dozen quotations, reached the news items. "Clémenceau calls on President Wilson." His eye ran down the mimeographed paragraphs. Suddenly he swung around, his face ashen and drawn, his hand clutching for the rail.

Pike's first thought was " a stroke." He slipped his arm about him. Boyd did not fall. He stood perhaps ten seconds, speechless, his mouth twitching, his eyes staring. In those moments Pike saw the man age visibly. Then he gathered himself.

"Andrews was my partner," he said thickly. "It's a bad shock. I'll be all right presently." He shot Pike a hunted look and made his way uncertainly down the stairs, turned to the left and disappeared.

Pike turned to the bulletin and read:

"Silas W. Andrews of Andrews, Boyd & Hopkins, bankers and brokers, was instantly killed yesterday as the result of a fall from the window of his apartment on the fourteenth floor of the Medora. In September, 1914, T. F. Hopkins, the junior partner, was killed as the result of a similar accident."

PIKE was standing motionless before the bulletin as Rivers came down the companionway.

"Any news in the great world?" he asked.

"Clémenceau has called on Mr. Wilson," Pike answered.

"Thanks," said Rivers. "That girl's on deck," he added. "Have you seen her?"

Pike nodded. "She doesn't remember me. Are you policing for lunch?"

"Yes."

"Come on then." Pike led the way in silence.

"What do you mean, she doesn't remember you?" Rivers demanded.

Pike laughed dryly. "What I say. I'm one of these colorless personalities that makes no impression."

"Does she admit she was in the hospital?"

"Yes. Remembers a subaltern in the next bed."

They had reached their stateroom. Rivers sat down on the bunk and lit a cigaret. "Did you ask her about the note?"

"I did not."

Rivers pondered. "It looks as if she were playing the game with the uncle?"

"It does."

"But why should she have written you the note?"

"I'm not sure that she did."

"We can settle that," said Rivers. He produced a letter from his pocket, took it from the envelope and handed it to Pike.

"Dear Major Rivers," it ran, "you are good to invite me to perform and to choose my own weapons, but the sad truth is I have absolutely no parlor tricks. If you were giving a Wild West show, I might give an amateurish impersonation of Annie Oakley. At a concert my place must be in the audience. Yours sincerely, Mary Crewe."

"How did you get that?" Pike demanded.

"Entertainment committee. I wrote asking her to volunteer for the concert. Compare it with yours."

Pike took the note from his wallet. "It's the same writing," he said. He gave it to Rivers, who studied the two documents.

"Yes," he said. "It doesn't need an expert. Well," he added, "what do you make of it?"

"I can't make anything of it. Can you?"

"Let's see the envelope," Rivers asked.

Pike handed it to him. It was of cheap, smooth paper with the address typewritten: "Lieut.-Colonel J. B. Pike—Personal. (To be opened by him when he is able to read.)"

"I wonder why she typed the address?" he muttered.

Pike shrugged his shoulders.

Rivers examined the note again. It was written on a slip of rough-finished notepaper of good quality.

"I wonder," thought Rivers, "why she tore off the bottom third of the sheet? One writes on half-sheets. One doesn't usually tear off a third. Do you mind if I keep these notes for a bit?" he asked.

Pike nodded. "I've been having a session with Boyd," he observed casually. "With some reservations I told him what we're after."

"The devil you say!"

Five minutes later Pike had finished narrating the conversation over the chess-table.

"That's interesting," said Rivers. "You're satisfied Boyd didn't know that your father got the purchase money?"

"I'm sure of it."

Rivers inhaled cigaret smoke and thoughtfully blew it out again. "Still," he said, "I don't see that it materially alters the situation."

"It seems to me that it does."

"Why?"

"Because Boyd knows now that he has been double-crossed by his own crowd."

"But that isn't going to make him blow the thing."

"I wouldn't be surprised. Boyd may have been acting in good faith as far as my father was concerned. Of course there's something crooked going on, but I doubt if that has anything to do with the robbery of my father. Unless I miss my guess, Boyd at this moment is worrying about something more serious than my being on the trail of the mine."

"And that?"

"And that," said Pike, "is something that is a matter for speculation. All we know is that the day my father sold the mine he fell out of a window; that the following autumn Hopkins, Boyd's junior partner, fell out of a window, and that yesterday Boyd's senior partner, Andrews, fell out of a window."

Rivers gave a low whistle. "You say yesterday?"

"It came in the wireless."

"Has Boyd seen it?"

"We read it together, ten minutes ago."

Rivers looked Pike in the eyes. "What does it mean?" he asked.

"Don't know. Judging from appearances, Boyd doesn't know either."

The lunch-bugle sounded. A few minutes later they went in to lunch. Boyd was not there; neither was Mary Crewe.

As the meal drew to a close, the ship's doctor came in. On the way out Pike made a detour, stopped and spoke to him.

"How is Boyd getting on?" he asked.

"He's quiet," the doctor answered. "I've given him an opiate. Do you know what happened?"

"He read the death of his partner in the wireless," Pike answered. "He seemed to take it hard."

"He acts like a man who's had a bad nervous shock," observed the doctor. "At first I thought he was in for a stroke, but I guess he'll come through."

"Is there anything I can do?"

The doctor reflected. "Not just at present. He'll be dead to the world for a couple of hours. If he needs some one to sit up with him to-night, I'll let you know. You might stop in and see Miss Crewe, though," he added. "She might want something. She's in the room next, 214."

Pike went on deck and found Rivers standing by the rail in the sun. "I'm going to do a little scout work," he said. "From the doctor I gather Boyd is pretty thoroughly doped."

"Want me?"

Pike shook his head. "It's a gum-shoe job. You'll be playing cards, I suppose?"

Rivers nodded.

"If I get anything, I'll look in on you." He filled his pipe, lit it and crossing to the other side of the ship paced the deck for ten minutes. Then he knocked out the pipe against the rail, stowed it in his pocket and headed for the companionway.

A minute later he was standing before the door of stateroom 212. There was no one in the corridor. He put his ear to the door and listened. Presently he made out the sound of measured breathing. He tried the door softly. It gave. He pressed it inward an inch or two and through the slit he saw that the connecting door to 214 was closed. He went in.

Boyd was lying on his back in the bunk, his eyes closed, his mouth open. The room was in semi-darkness, for the shutter was drawn across the window.

Pike made a hurried inspection of the stateroom. He noted a leather dispatch-case hanging from a hook on the partition wall. The key was in the lock. He crept softly to it, opened it and drew out a packet of papers.

The light was too dim to read by. He considered the chances, then stealthily slid back the shutter a few inches. A slit of light illuminated the end of the room away from the sleeper. Pike waited a few moments. Boyd gave no sign that he was sensible to the light.

In an elastic band were a dozen letters and cables folded lengthwise. The paper on top was a cable. He drew it out and opened it. The message, addressed to Boyd at his London hotel, ran: "Informed that P. has applied for demobilization. Get in touch with him. If he comes home, advisable to sail with him. Tax situation growing acute. Must decide shortly regarding shipment of bars. Feltner."

Pike reread the message, photographing it into his memory. He replaced it methodically and drew out the letter that came next. He was turning to get the light over his shoulder when he stumbled clumsily over Boyd's boots. The sleeper stirred. Pike watched him breathless till he settled again. He waited still another period, his attention directed toward the cabin next. As he stood thus he noticed a white object on the floor. He bent and picked it up. It was a woman's handkerchief. A scent of violet reached him.

He thrust the scrap of embroidered lawn into his pocket and unfolded the letter. It was written in pencil and the handwriting was difficult. "Dear Harry," it began, "the situation is constantly growing more complicated." The next word was illegible. He moved cautiously nearer to the window. Suddenly he stopped. The handle of the door behind him was being softly turned.

He thrust the papers into the dispatch-case, swung around and found himself looking into the muzzle of a Lueger pistol held by Mary Crewe.

"You!" she exclaimed in a whisper. Amazement was in her eyes.

"Yes, I."

"What are you doing?"

"Put that thing down and I'll tell you."

"Go out; instantly!" she commanded.

"I'd rather explain first," he answered.

Her gray eyes blazed with anger. "Don't dare to speak to me. Go out!"

With a sudden lunge Pike seized the pistol. She struggled to wrench it free. Then Pike, throwing his free arm about her, bore her through the doorway into her cabin.

As he crushed her to him her fingers released their grip upon the weapon. For a moment she lay passive in his arms, her head upon his shoulder. He dropped the pistol on the bunk and set her down upon the couch opposite. Then he backed away and closed the door into Boyd's cabin.

"You and I must have a show-down," he said in a low voice. "If you'll answer my questions, I'll tell you what I was doing."

She was leaning back upon the couch pillows, limp, her eyes closed, her bosom heaving. As he waited, she became calmer, at last opened her eyes.

"In the first place," he said, "what made you write me that letter in the hospital and then forget me on the ship?"

She closed her eyes again.

"There's no use stalling," he said. "I know you wrote it. Why not be sensible?"

She opened her eyes. "What are you talking about?" she demanded.

"You know what I'm talking about," he answered patiently. "You take care of me in the hospital. You warn me that I'm being watched in an anonymous letter——"

"Anonymous?" she broke in.

"You thought it was anonymous. I know now you wrote it."

She gazed at him in wide-eyed amazement. "You say I wrote you an *anonymous* letter?"

"That's what I said; and until Rivers showed me the letter you wrote him I couldn't be sure that it was you. But I'm sure now."

She gazed at him perplexedly. Then a light seemed to break upon her. "Will you let me see that letter?"

"Later; Rivers has it just now."

Suddenly she covered her face with her hands. Her body began to shake, whether in suppressed laughter or sobbing Pike could not tell. He diagnosed it as hysteria and stood nonplussed. He had no experience with hysterical women.

At last she gave a long sigh, uncovered her face and sat up. Something more than a change of mood had come about. She seemed to have taken on a new personality as she might have donned a new mask, a personality buoyant, confident, whimsically authoritative.

"Well?" said Pike.

There came a muttering from the next cabin. She listened and sprang up.

"He's awake," she whispered.

"Oh, Mary!" Boyd called weakly.

"I'm coming," she called.

Pike slipped out by the door into the corridor. He made his way on deck and began to walk.

A half-hour later he was stopped by Rivers as he was passing him deep in thought.

"Cut out for a rubber," Rivers explained. "What luck?"

"Rivers," said Pike, "either I'm crazy or that girl is." Omitting certain details he told his story.

Rivers listened with a curious look in his eyes. "Getting that Feltner telegraph was a stroke," he commented irrelevantly.

"But that girl!" said Pike. "Can you make anything out of it?"

Rivers regarded him doubtfully. "I've got to go back to the card-table," he said. "Talk it over with you later." And he went off.

When Rivers went below to dress for dinner, he found Pike completing that ceremony. "I've been thinking about the girl," he said. "You say she seemed to get over her anger?"

"She seemed to," said Pike. "It beats me. I'm going on deck."

A Lueger pistol lay on his bunk. He opened his kit-bag and dropped it in.

"Have you unloaded that thing?" asked Rivers.

"No, but it's all right," Pike answered. "The safety-lock is on. No one is going to monkey with it," and with that he went out.

When the door closed, Rivers opened the bag and took out the weapon. He pressed the spring and drew out the magazine and examined it. It was empty. Then he threw back the ejector. The firing-chamber was empty, too. He threw the safety lock, pointed it at the floor and pulled the trigger. The mechanism snapped harmlessly. With that he replaced the pistol in the bag and completed his toilet.

NEITHER Boyd nor Miss Crewe appeared at dinner. Pike talked little and Rivers devoted himself to his food and to the Krug. As they finished, Pike went over to inquire of the doctor about Boyd. A moment later Rivers passed out of the dining-room and headed for stateroom 214. He knocked, a voice answered "Come in," and he entered.

Mary Crewe was sitting on the couch reading a book, with a dinner-tray before her.

"I beg your pardon," Rivers began.

She started and looked up. "I thought it was the waiter," she exclaimed. "Won't you take the chair?"

"Can't stop," said Rivers. "Thanks awfully. How is Mr. Boyd?"

"Doing very well," she answered. "He had some milk and has gone to sleep again."

"You ought to get a bit of air," said Rivers. "Come on deck with me. We'll walk."

"Suppose he should wake?"

"He can ring the bell for the steward. But he probably will sleep."

She considered. "I'll go," she said. "I do need air." She rose, put on a little toque of fur and threw a golf cape over her shoulders. Reaching the deck, she set off at a rapid pace with Rivers at her side.

They were beginning on the second turn when Rivers protested. "I can't keep this up, you know. I'm a frail creature. Besides I want to talk to you."

She laughed and slowed down. "I'm not sure that I want to be talked to," she said.

"I dare say not," he answered, laughing, "but I've got a serious question to put to you."

"Well?"

"Well," he repeated, "exactly what is the meaning of this pistol performance?"

"Well, really!" she exclaimed. She looked at him in astonishment real or assumed.

Rivers laughed. "Don't let's worry about good manners. You've been through war as we have. Let's talk man-fashion."

She said nothing and Rivers went on. "You see, Pike has told me about his burglary; ridiculous, of course, but what was the idea of holding him up with an empty gun?"

"Did he know it was empty?"

"No, and he doesn't now. But the point is, if you wanted to protect your uncle's papers why didn't you ring the bell for a steward?"

"I suppose it was silly," she answered, "but I saw a strange man's arm through the slit in the window. I supposed it was some one stealing. I hurried down-stairs. I didn't think out what I was doing, but I got the pistol out of my bag—you see I was brought up on a ranch—and then to my amazement I found it was Colonel Pike."

"I should think, then, it would have been natural to have asked him to explain instead of refusing to listen to him."

"I don't think I care to discuss that," she said stiffly. "Besides, there wasn't *anything* to explain."

"You don't mean you considered it natural for Pike to be going through your uncle's papers?"

"I knew he was in the British Intelligence. I supposed it was his business."

"But why should he be prying into your uncle's affairs?"

"For the reason that they pry into everybody's affairs. For the same reason that they went through his baggage at the hospital. They want to know what every one is doing."

"So that's what your note meant?"

"Naturally."

"How did you find out that his luggage had been searched?"

"One of the orderlies told me."

"Do you know who did it?"

"They said it was a man in a Red-Cross uniform."

"I see," said Rivers. "Now, I'm going to tell you that Pike hasn't been in the British Intelligence for ten days. What he was doing in your uncle's cabin is entirely a personal matter."

She looked at him, mystified. "What do you mean?" she demanded.

"I'm going to tell you, but there's something we've got to get straightened out first."

"But I must know what this all means!" she exclaimed with a note of alarm. "Why should Colonel Pike be going through my uncle's papers?"

"And I must know," said Rivers, "why you pretended not to remember him?"

"Really, Major Rivers," she said, "I think that is purely my affair."

"But it isn't. There's more to this than you realize. However, I believe I know why you did it." He put his hand in his breast pocket and drew out the two notes. "Let's move on to the light," he said. She followed.

"Now this is the shape your letter was in when Pike received it." He handed her the bit of note-paper and the typed envelope. "You see why it was anonymous when he read it. The signature has been torn off with the address you doubtless gave him, the original envelope destroyed and this typed one substituted."

She looked at him dumfounded. "Who did it?"

"I don't know. Presumably a jealous nurse. But you can understand now why Pike never wrote you. He made a trip to Boulogne to find you. As he didn't know your name, he failed."

He paused, but she said nothing and he went on. "Now, you see, my dear Miss Crewe, there has been a very natural misunderstanding on your part. You had a right to assume that Colonel Pike had ignored the service you did him and the opportunity you gave him to communicate with you. Your resentment was justifiable, but you realize now that it was based on a misapprehension of the facts. From what Pike told me I gather that you guessed the truth as soon as he spoke of your note as anonymous."

"What did he tell you?"

"Oh, he said you were inscrutable, baffling, utterly mad."

She turned away from the light and Rivers fancied that he heard a nervous laugh.

"But you don't understand," he went on, "how important it is to have this misunderstanding straightened out. We must know where you stand. Are you a friend or an enemy?"

"Why should I be an enemy?" she answered. "What is the matter anyhow? What is there between Colonel Pike and my uncle? You can't ask me to go blindly into taking sides against my uncle."

"I am not asking you to take sides against your uncle. He is in a peculiar and difficult position, perhaps a dangerous one. Our motive is interested, but we want to extricate him if it is possible."

"But you must see that I can't decide blindly."

"I suppose not," he said. He paused and looked at her thoughtfully. "I'm going to trust you," he said at last. "I'm going to tell you the whole story."

He began with his meeting Pike in Boulogne when Pike first showed him the anonymous note, went on detailing the circumstances of the visit to the Clarjes Street woman, told of the message purporting to come from William Lassiter, the father, and the facts known to the son to which it related. Then he recounted the decision to sail on the *Spartic*, the steward's evidence of Boyd's having arranged their seating, the course of Pike's relation with Boyd and the effect of the news of Andrews's death upon him. She listened, breathless, till he finished. "What an extraordinary story!" she said.

"It's certainly that," said Rivers.

After a moment's silence, she asked: "What does Colonel Pike think about it?"

"He thinks there is some kind of conspiracy which robbed his father and of which your uncle is a prospective victim."

"Does he think his father and my uncle's partners have been murdered?"

"I fancy he does."

"What do you think?" she demanded.

"I don't know what to think," he answered. "I'm trying to keep an open mind. But you see now why Pike went through your uncle's papers."

"Did he find anything?"

"He had only begun when you appeared. However, there was a cable which seemed to indicate that a man named Feltner was directing the thing."

"I never heard my uncle speak of any one named Feltner," she said. "However, that isn't strange. He never talks to me about his business. The fact is," she added, "I really know my uncle very slightly."

"How is that?" he asked.

She told him briefly. Boyd was her mother's brother. He had come from California as a boy and settled in New York. She had been born on her father's ranch in Arizona where Boyd had visited them when she was a child. Her mother had died when she was nine and her father in 1912. Since her mother's death, till she passed through New York on her way to Europe to study music, she had not seen Boyd. When the war broke out she went as a nurse with the English. In January after the armistice Boyd had written that he was coming to London on business and proposed that she meet him and go home with him. So practically all her acquaintance with him was the fortnight she had spent with him in London before they sailed. He had urged her to make her home with him in New York, and until conditions abroad became more normal she was planning to do so.

"Well," said Rivers, "you see the situation. We've got to get to the bottom of this thing. Whether there's been murder, whether there's a room full of gold, I don't pretend to say, but it's reasonably certain that there was a mine and that Pike's father was robbed and that in some way your uncle is mixed up with the persons who robbed him. Now, I don't ask you to spy on your uncle. In one sense this is no affair of yours. You were brought into it by chance, just as I was, but I suppose you realize that it was your uncle's agent who went through Pike's kit at the hospital."

"I suppose it was," she said slowly.

"Of course that hasn't really anything to do with the main question, but it has brought about a very unfortunate misunderstanding with Pike."

"I should think that could be set right."

"It can be if you'll do it."

He waited, but she said nothing, and he went on. "I don't want to butt into personal matters, but the fact is it's rather serious. Pike is all upset. He's not the kind that talks, but I began to suspect the way he felt, even in Boulogne when he went off to look you up at the hospital. When he saw you that night getting into the motor in front of the Ritz, I was sure of it. After you had pretended not to remember him I was doubly sure. Pike is in love with you."

She stood motionless. Rivers thought he heard her quickened breathing.

"What do you want me to do?" she said uncertainly.

"Why, of course I don't know what your idea of old Pike is," he answered, "but if you were a man—" he stopped.

"Well?"

"If you were a man, the only thing you could do as a gentleman would be to tell him that you love him and marry him to-morrow."

An exclamation escaped her. For an instant she stood gazing at him open-eyed, then with a peal of laughter she turned and fled down the deck.

Rivers finished his cigaret and made his way to the card-table in the smoking-room.

Toward midnight he went below and found Pike lying dressed in his bunk, with a book. "Bridge go well?" he asked.

"Moderate," Rivers answered. He caught a glimpse of Pike's book in the mirror over the washstand. It was upside down. "I've been having a talk with Miss Crewe," he observed.

Pike said nothing.

"I've been arranging that she marry you to-morrow."

Pike laid down the book. "Don't be an ass!" he said.

"I'm not an ass," Rivers replied mildly. "I've gone over the whole thing with her. Very embarrassing, of course, but had to be done. Well, the important fact is, that she didn't say 'no.' "

"Look here, Rivers," Pike began angrily, but Rivers stopped him.

"You can't quarrel with me, old son. I'm telling you the truth. The girl was vexed, and quite right too. You see, that note was signed and had an address when she pinned it on you. Some curious swine opens it, cuts off signature, address and friendly messages, types new envelope and gives it to you. Result, misunderstanding and ill feelin'."

Pike was sitting up in bed. "Rivers," he said, "are you making this up?"

"Now, I ask you," Rivers answered plaintively, "am I intellectually capable of making this up? Besides," he added, and there was a change in his tone, "you're rather a friend of mine—what?"

The next moment he experienced what he had not experienced since his lower-form days at Eton. His hair was tousled and profaned by sacrilegious hands; also he was seized, lifted and dumped on the couch.

"I say! I say!" he protested, but it was to the empty air, for Pike had grabbed a cap and dashed out.

Rivers lay for a time laughing softly. Then he arose, polished his hair with his brushes and proceeded to undress. When Pike came in that night, or what happened when he met Mary Crewe the next day, Rivers never knew.

A little after ten the next morning he and Pike had come face to face with her as she emerged from the companionway. She was self-possessed as usual, but he saw her color rise.

"How is Mr. Boyd this morning?" Pike asked stiffly.

"Much better, thank you," she answered.

"Glorious morning," observed Rivers, and went on.

An hour later he cut out for a rubber and coming aft found them by the rail, discussing the league of nations.

"Well," he said pleasantly, "anything new?"

"We've passed two ships," said the girl.

"Did you ever breathe such air?" said Pike. "I never did except in Arizona."

And that was all that was vouchsafed Rivers. "Virginal natures very complex," he thought; "can't be hurried." But Pike thenceforth was himself again, and from that he argued that some sort of *modus vivendi* had been established.

THE next morning Boyd was again reported better. At lunch a waiter handed Pike a note. He read it and passed it to Rivers. "Can you come to my cabin at two o'clock?" was all it said. It was signed "Boyd." Rivers passed it back. "I wonder if he's found out that his dispatch-case has been tampered with?" he said.

"I don't know that it matters," said Pike.

At two o'clock Pike knocked at the door of 212.

Boyd's voice called "Come in!" and he entered. He found the sick man sitting on the couch. He looked white and older. The lines in his face had deepened, but for the rest he seemed to have recovered his cheerful confidence of manner.

"Well, Pike," he said, "I'm ashamed of myself. The news about Andrews gave me a shock that knocked my digestive apparatus. The doctor tells me I've been eating too much."

"They say most of us dig our graves with our teeth," observed Pike.

"I'm going on a diet as soon as I get ashore," Boyd went on, "but I didn't get you in here to hear about my diseases. I want to talk about your affairs. That story you told me interested me, Pike."

"It's a curious yarn," Pike observed.

Boyd glanced about him furtively. "Oh, Mary!" he called. There was no answer.

"Take a look in the next room, do you mind?"

Pike opened the door. The cabin was empty.

"Thanks," said Boyd. "She said she was going on deck, but I wanted to make sure. Well, to go on: this surely is a small world, Pike. Here you tell me this story, a chance acquaintance, mention no names, and yet it happens that I've heard about the transaction, enough about it to be pretty sure it's the same one. Extraordinary, isn't it?" He forced a laugh.

"Sure extraordinary," said Pike. "Have you heard enough to know that I am William Lassiter's son?"

"I inferred that," Boyd said cautiously. He paused as if turning over in his mind how to begin.

"Well," said Pike at last, "this is of course a piece of luck for me. You ought to be able to tell me who bought the half-interest."

"Possibly I could do that," Boyd answered, "but first there are one or two points that I want cleared up for my own satisfaction. You see," he went on, "as far as I knew, the whole deal was on the square. Your father sold and these other parties bought. Now, you tell me that your father never got the purchase money. I can't charge these other parties with bad faith till I'm sure about that."

"Is it your understanding, Mr. Boyd, that these other parties bought the whole mine?"

"That is my understanding. Half of it was sold to—well, call it a syndicate, and one member of the syndicate bought the other half on his own account. You don't know anything to the contrary?"

"Only that my father wrote he was selling half and holding half. He might have changed his mind after he wrote."

"He might. Still the main question is what became of the money. Whether your father sold all or part, some one got away with what was paid him."

Pike nodded.

"Now, I can get in touch with the man who acted for the syndicate, who paid the money. He may be able to give you some lead. Your father may have told him what he was going to do with it; something about his intentions. I want you, on your part, to investigate your New York lawyer. Find out if he's made a lot of money in the past few years, whether his manner of living has changed."

"But as I told you before," said Pike, "my father never could have cashed the checks. If he had banked them, they would have been there after his death."

"But I happen to know they were cashed," said Boyd. He gazed at Pike with an anxious questioning look in his eyes.

"Then you must have seen his signature on the vouchers?"

Boyd was silent. Then he burst out; "Hell, what's the use of beating about the bush. I had a quarter interest in a half. I've got a canceled check for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars with your father's signature on it, and no bank would have paid it unless it was genuine."

"Well, then," said Pike, "how do you account for the disappearance of the money?"

"I can't account for it; but several things may have happened. In the first place, your father didn't cash the checks himself. He bought bonds. He endorsed them over to a certain party for government bonds."

"How do you know that?" asked Pike.

"I tell you I have a voucher with your father's endorsement on it to a certain party. It was an unusual endorsement, for it recites the consideration, United States bonds at the market price for the amount of the check."

"You mean," said Pike, "that when my father endorsed the check over he gave a receipt for government bonds for the amount of the check?"

"Exactly," said Boyd. "It ran like this: 'William Lassiter. Pay to So-and-So for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of United States bonds at market this day.' "

"Why do you suppose he wrote a receipt on the back of a check that was to go back to you? Why wasn't a receipt to the party you call So-and-So sufficient?"

"I presume," said Boyd, "that this party in question wanted to protect himself against any suspicion that he hadn't paid our money over. As I remember it, he said that your father told him he was off to Europe and wanted to invest this money in government securities till he got back. This man had some large blocks that he wanted to get out of, so he turned them over to your father. It saved broker's commissions for both of them."

"Was he the man who bought the other half-interest?"

"He was," said Boyd. "I don't mind telling you that. After the deal was closed he told your father that he had another million in government bonds and asked him if he didn't want to close out his entire interest in the mine. Your father thought about it and decided to sell. Then he executed another deed, and went off in a taxi with the bonds wrapped up in a big brown-paper parcel. What he did with them I don't know. If he took them to his hotel——"

"Take two millions in government bonds to his hotel!" exclaimed Pike. "You didn't know my father! We lived in a country where a man was likely to be murdered for two hundred."

"Still, it's a possibility; it's got to be looked into," Boyd insisted.

"How would you propose to look into it?"

"Investigate the lawyer. Investigate the circumstances surrounding his death. There must be police records. Find out if any one could have been in the room with him when he had his accident."

"There was no suspicion of foul play."

"No, there wasn't, but look here, Pike—" Boyd hesitated, his mouth twitched, and Pike saw the look come into his eyes that was there when he read the news of Andrews's death. "Doesn't it strike you as queer that Hopkins, Andrews and your father all should fall out of high windows?" His voice had dropped to a hoarse whisper.

"Were Andrews and Hopkins in the syndicate?"

"Yes."

"On the same terms as you?"

"Yes."

"Then there's somebody else with a fourth interest in the half?"

Boyd nodded. "It was the man I haven't named, who bought the other half."

"Hadn't you better tell me who it was?"

"I can't give you his name to-day. I haven't the right. I've got to see him first. I've got to consult with him. There's something unusual about the situation. It doesn't concern you."

"If it has anything to do with the reason for your going through my papers in Boulogne I should say it did concern me," said Pike.

Boyd forced a laugh. "Well," he said, "there's really no reason why you shouldn't know. You're going to be declared in on the deal. I'm not going to stand for having you robbed no matter who did it. There's enough to go round."

"Well?"

"It was this way," Boyd went on. "The original idea was to incorporate the mine, issue stock and put it on the market. The reports of our expert had borne out your father's claim. It was a big property."

"Was your expert in the syndicate?"

"It was Hopkins. He was a mining engineer. The firm specializes in mining securities. Well, after we got the property, Hopkins went out again and did some more exploring. He pushed down into the vein and struck ore that was—good God, man! it wasn't ore at all; it was solid gold! It lay like native copper in the Calumet and Hecla. Well, then the idea was to skim the cream by hand, so to speak. Of course it was just a pocket, but Hopkins was afraid to hire men to take it out, so for six or eight months we worked it ourselves in shifts of two and sent the gold back East."

"By express as silver concentrates, I suppose."

"No, by motor-car. Well, this cement gold held on and the first thing we knew we'd chiseled out a sum that frightened us. We were all paying pretty fair income taxes and it seemed as if we might declare a private dividend on this pocket stuff without hurting the government. Then came the war and the excess-profits tax and the increase of the income tax rates, and none of us wanted to turn in more than half in taxes.

"Well, the idea was suggested that as long as the pocket held out we'd keep the gold in a pool and we signed a paper among ourselves, making a sort of tontine pot out of it. If any one died before we divided, his share went to the rest. No executors were to be let in on it."

"Whose suggestion was that?"

"I don't remember," said Boyd shortly, "but if I did I wouldn't tell you now."

"And then Hopkins fell out of a window," said Pike as if thinking aloud, "and then Andrews, and now you're wondering who's going to be the next?"

Boyd made no answer. He wiped his forehead with his handkercheif.

His face had grown ashy white. "What do you think about it?" he asked hoarsely. "Your father, Hopkins, Andrews—it's a damned strange coincidence."

"I don't know what to think," Pike answered. "I don't know your other partner, the one who bought the other half interest."

"It couldn't be him," Boyd answered emphatically. "That isn't what I mean. It isn't a case of murder. How could it be? You can't throw a man out of a window and leave no traces of a struggle."

"It wouldn't seem so."

"No, it couldn't be that," said Boyd tensely. "I don't know what to think. But Pike"—he hesitated—"do you suppose there could be something we don't understand, call it a hoodoo or something, you know what I mean, something that follows this gold? I'm not a superstitious man, Pike; I'm a hard-headed business man, but there's something hellish about this and it gets my goat."

"You haven't had any desire to jump out of a window?"

"Not I," Boyd answered. "I want to live. I've got everything to live for. But so had Andrews, so had Hopkins, so had your father. You might say it was a bad conscience," he went on, "but what is holding out on the government? That wouldn't have troubled Andrews nor Hopkins. It doesn't trouble me. If the government wants to collect on the bullion, let them find it. It's up to them."

"That's hardly the conventional way of looking at the income tax," Pike observed.

"Well, it's my way. My conscience is clear, so was Andrews's, so was Hopkins's. Besides, there's your father. He hadn't held out. Why should he have done it?"

"We don't know that he did. They said he went to the window to open it and had heart failure."

"They said that about Hopkins. Probably they're saying it about Andrews," Boyd replied. "I don't believe in it."

Pike was gazing vacantly at the window. There was a long silence. "Boyd," he said at last, "you'd better tell me who the other partner is."

"I can't do that till I have had a talk with him," Boyd answered. "You must realize that?"

"Is it Feltner?" asked Pike.

Boyd started. "No, it isn't Feltner," he answered doggedly. "What made you think so?"

Pike looked him in the eyes. "That's for me to say when you've laid your cards on the table, Mr. Boyd."

There was a long silence. Boyd wavered. Then he brought his fist down with a crash. "So help me God, I can't do it now!" he blurted out. "It wouldn't be square. But I will later on. Pike, on my word of honor, you're going to be taken care of. I'm going to run this thing down and all that you're entitled to you're going to get. By God! you shall have my share! I want to get out. I don't like it, Pike. I'm no coward, but this has got my nerve. You can't tell me it's a coincidence."

"I'm not trying to tell you it's a coincidence. I'm asking you to tell me the name of the man who has profited by it."

"But that's impossible."

"Have it your own way then."

"Now, look here," said Boyd. "We'll dock to-morrow forenoon. By to-morrow night I'll know what I'm talking about. Perhaps I'll know what your father did with the bonds. You dine with me to-morrow night and we'll have a show-down." He held out his hand and Pike took it.

Toward four o'clock, in their cabin, Pike was recounting to Rivers the features of his interview with Boyd. As he finished, Rivers mechanically lighted a fresh cigaret.

"Odd idea, that of Boyd's about the hoodoo," he said reflectively.

Pike gave a shrug to his shoulders.

"You don't believe in it?"

"Certainly not. I believe it's murder."

"But as Boyd observed," said Rivers, "you can't throw a man out of a window without making a fuss."

"That's a detail," Pike answered. "A question of technique."

"Well," said Rivers, "I dare say to-morrow night we shall know a good deal more than we do now. We can be thankful that the fear of God has been put into our friend Boyd. You don't think he'll back down?"

"No," said Pike. "I think Mr. Boyd will come across with everything he has."

They docked next day at eleven in the forenoon.

"Dinner at eight," said Boyd. They were saying good-by on the pier. His cheerful, confident manner had come back. His step was brisk. He slipped his arm through Pike's and drew him aside. "You'll see the lawyer?" he whispered.

"I'm going there now," Pike answered. "Rivers is going up-town with the baggage."

"Good," said Boyd.

Rivers looked on cynically as Pike said good-by to Mary Crewe. "Like an old married man," he thought. "He'd better look out, though." He caught a gleam in the girl's eye.

A clerk from Boyd's office appeared. He had a pull with a customs official and had been admitted to the pier. Boyd gave him his keys, and the custody of his niece and the luggage and went off in a taxi to Wall Street.

Shortly afterward Pike made a similar transfer of responsibility to Rivers and went to the offices of Amos Langford, counselor-at-law.

It was on the stroke of five that afternoon that Pike reached the hotel and came in on Rivers lolling in an arm-chair before a tea-table.

"Any luck?" asked Rivers.

"On the whole, yes," Pike answered. "Langford had copies of the minutes of the police investigation in his files. They were what I wanted to see."

"Do they prove anything?"

Pike shrugged his shoulders. "It seems that father had a room on the twelfth floor. It was on the street and there was no fire-escape. The fire-escape was at the end of the hall. That is to say, there was no means of ingress or egress except through the doors.

"The room had a door that connected it through a closet with the suite to the west, but that door was bolted on father's side. The people in the suite were the Bryce Appletons of Boston, everything that is respectable. The door into the hall was also bolted on the inside. It had to be broken down to get in. No one could very well have thrown him out the window, bolted those doors and gone out through one of them."

"There was no possibility of getting from window to window?"

"There was no cornice or ledge according to the evidence and there was a stretch of eight feet before there was anything to hold on to."

"But that knocks the murder theory," said Rivers.

"It would seem to, as far as he is concerned."

"His effects were taken charge of by the police?"

"Yes; they turned his cash and jewelry over to Langford with the rest of his things."

"And there were no bonds?"

"There were no bonds, but after Langford showed me the inventory that he receipted for to the police I asked him if he was satisfied that everything found in the room had been entered in the inventory. He said, 'Yes, everything except a big brown-paper parcel.' The police had opened it and found it full of folded newspapers. It was just so much waste-paper, so they threw it out."

Rivers gave a low exclamation. "Boyd's bundle of bonds—what?"

"It might be."

"But no sane man would have been taken in that way."

"That trick isn't so hard to turn," said Pike, "but you never could make me believe that my father would take what he thought was a fortune in negotiable securities to a New York hotel, especially as he already had a safe-deposit box at a downtown bank."

"Still, it's a possibility," said Rivers. "In any case it puts it up to Boyd's excellent friend."

"Unless the police took them," said Pike. "That's a possibility too."

"What's your impression of the lawyer fellow?" asked Rivers after a silence.

"I think he's straight," said Pike. "As soon as he saw the situation he said, 'The first thing I've got to do as your lawyer is to investigate Amos Langford's accounts since 1914.' He ordered a clerk to bring in his books and vouchers and we went through the whole bunch."

"Of course," said Rivers, "that doesn't definitely prove anything. He might have another set of bank-accounts."

"That's what he suggested," Pike answered. "It's another possibility."

His gaze wandered off into space. One of his "absent from the body" spells, as Rivers called them, was coming on.

"I dare say all these questions will clear up after we've had our talk with Boyd," observed Rivers.

Pike nodded vaguely. A troubled look came into his eyes. Suddenly he sat up with a start. "I don't know why," he said, "but I have a feeling that Boyd is going to lay down on us."

"He's in too deep," said Rivers.

"I know, and yet I'm anxious."

Rivers got up to look for matches.

"What do you say to a bit of a walk?" he suggested presently. "Good thing before dining."

Pike assented and they went out.

They turned down Fifth Avenue and walked in silence. The up-town tide of traffic was at the flood. Crowds of hurrying shop-girls, stenographers and clerks poured out of the tall buildings. The line of heavily loaded busses lurched and crawled northward through the sea of vehicles.

"Extraordinary thing, this civilization," observed Rivers, "and the most extraordinary thing about it is that it doesn't mean anything. A jolly little fleet of bombing-planes and where are you?"

"Well, for one thing," said Pike irrelevantly, "we're approaching the Waldorf bar. It's five years since I've had an American cocktail and you, you benighted alien, have never had one. With the dry wave coming on there's no time to lose."

"Naturally, if you feel that way about it," said Rivers, and they turned in.

As they came out through the lobby they passed the news-stand on the right. Suddenly Pike was aware that Rivers had dropped behind. Glancing back he saw him paying for an armful of newspapers. He picked up his change and came on with his habitual unhurried calm.

"I happened to notice this pink chap as we passed," he said, and handed Pike an *Evening Telegram*. "Rather sudden—what?"

THE flaring headline that met Pike's eye was this: "H. S. Boyd Falls Fourteen Stories—Banker and Broker Instantly Killed—Third member of Firm to take Death Plunge."

Pike lowered the paper. His gaze rested for a moment on the impassive countenance of Rivers. Then without speaking he crossed the corridor, entered the Turkish room and stationing himself by one of the Thirty-third Street windows began to read the news story. Rivers followed.

"At ten minutes to four this afternoon," the account ran, "H. S. Boyd, of the firm of Andrews, Boyd & Hopkins, fell from the window of his office on the fourteenth floor of the Seneca Building to the street. Death was instantaneous. Nassau Street was crowded at the time and a passer-by who declined to give his name narrowly escaped being struck by the falling body. Identification was immediately established by papers in Mr. Boyd's pockets and the police notified the employees in the firm's offices.

"Mr. Boyd had arrived from Europe on the *Spartic* this morning and on leaving the ship had gone directly to his office. Since three o'clock, according to statements of the office force, he had been in his private office occupied with business of the firm. So far as known, he had seen no one since that time. About three-twenty-five Charles Z. Stimson, the office manager, knocked at the door, but received no answer. He was under the impression that he heard Mr. Boyd's voice in conversation, but presumed that he was speaking on the telephone. About quarter to four o'clock Raymond L. Sibelius, a step-brother of the deceased, called and asked to see Mr. Boyd. The office boy knocked, but received no answer and reported that Mr. Boyd was engaged. This was pursuant to a standing order that when Mr. Boyd did not reply he was to be reported 'engaged.' Sibelius waited till nearly four and then asked that his name be sent in.

"The telephone operator called Mr. Boyd, but the call was not answered, and Mr. Sibelius was informed that Mr. Boyd had probably left the office by the door opening into the corridor. Mr. Stimson then opened Mr. Boyd's office and the room was found empty. A moment later a policeman entered and announced the accident. Sibelius and the office manager went at once to the street and confirmed the identification.

"On the assumption that Mr. Boyd's death was the result of accident, it is supposed that he had been opening the window and losing his balance pitched out. No motive for suicide can as yet be assigned, though it is believed that the recent death of S. W. Andrews and the death two years ago of Thomas F. Hopkins, Mr. Boyd's two partners, both by falls from high windows, may have temporarily unbalanced his mind."

Rivers finished first, folded the paper under his arm and lighted a cigaret. A moment later Pike was gazing at him with a troubled look in his eyes.

"Poor devil!" he muttered.

"This window thing is getting a bit thick," said Rivers.

Pike nodded. "I was afraid of it," he said vaguely. "But not so soon."

"It's a surprise to me," observed Rivers. "He didn't seem the kind of chap to go off his head. Our murder theory is knocked."

"How knocked?"

Rivers looked at him in surprise.

"You think," said Pike, "these four men just happened to end the same way; coincidence?"

"I don't think anything of the sort. I think the reasonable view is that Hopkins, Andrews and Boyd worried themselves into it. In a sense Boyd's idea of a hoodoo was right. They were in a deal that was crooked and it got 'em. They went insane and killed themselves."

"And my father?"

"His case hasn't anything to do with the others. Either it was an accident or he killed himself. If he went back to the hotel and found that the bundle of what he supposed to be securities was only waste-paper, it might very well have unbalanced him."

"If you believe the Clarjes Street woman——"

"I don't believe her," Rivers broke in. "I don't understand it, but I believe it's a fraud. It must be. The manner of your father's death," he went on, "possibly suggested the window method to Hopkins. That's the only connection."

Pike was gazing vacantly into Thirty-third Street. "No," he muttered, "the murder theory is established."

"Keep your head, man!" said Rivers sharply, "or you'll be diving out of a window yourself."

"That's a possibility for both of us."

"But Pike!" Rivers cried with a vehemence unusual with him, "how in God's name could this chap Boyd have been murdered? Assuming this newspaper report is substantially accurate, it's an impossibility! Suppose somebody had come in by the door leading into the corridor. Wouldn't Boyd have made a howl at the first sign of violence?"

"A sock full of sand could have prevented that," Pike answered. "But it wasn't a sock full of sand. I don't know what it was, but I'll get it," he went on as if thinking aloud. "Good God!" he exclaimed. "Do you see where the wax cylinder comes in?"

"No," said Rivers, "I don't. Do you realize Miss Crewe is at Boyd's house?"

"Of course," Pike answered absently. "Come along. We must go there. Get a taxi."

FROM the butler's manner in admitting them Rivers gathered that the news had not yet reached Boyd's household.

"I think Miss Crewe is in, sir," the man volunteered. "I'll take your names up." He ushered them into a reception-room and disappeared.

Pike, abstracted and silent, began to pace a strip of Oriental carpet.

The clock on the mantel-shelf ticked monotonously. A minute passed, then another, and then Rivers heard a light step and turning was facing Mary Crewe.

"There's some rather serious news," he began.

"I know," she said steadily. "They telephoned from the office. I've said nothing to the servants. I knew you'd come."

"Mary," said Pike abruptly, "do you know whether your uncle sent any wireless telegrams from the ship?"

"He sent one yesterday in code," she answered, "shortly after you visited him in his cabin."

"Do you know to whom?"

"It was to a man named Dawson."

"And the address?"

"The address was the firm's, Andrews, Boyd & Hopkins."

Pike nodded thoughtfully. "I must go," he said. "Rivers will stay with you. Don't go out. Don't see any one except the servants unless Rivers is with you." He looked at his watch. It was five minutes past six.

She made no question. "Do you wish to make a search for papers? I can arrange it, but we must be quick. His stepbrother, Mr. Sibelius, is coming."

"He took his dispatch-case to the office," said Pike.

"Yes, I noticed that."

"I doubt if there would be anything here. Besides I must go."

"Very well," she said. She seemed to understand his abstracted manner. "You will come back?"

"As soon as possible, or telephone." He went out, found his hat in the hall and let himself out. Once in the street he walked rapidly toward Lexington Avenue.

At twenty-five minutes to seven Pike emerged from the Rector Street subway station. He oriented himself, crossed Broadway and turned into the empty cañon of Wall Street. Where an hour before the tide of jostling humanity was at the flood his tread rang through silent, lonely spaces. He began to fear that he had come too late. He turned north at Nassau Street and a few moments later entered the towering office-building where Andrews, Boyd & Hopkins had conducted their business. One elevator was still running. It bore him swiftly to the fourteenth floor, sank again and disappeared. He crossed the hall to a lettered door and softly tried it. It was locked. He had expected that. He put his ear close to the glass. From some inner room came the muffled ticking of a typewriter. The sounds came halting and irregular as if some one unfamiliar with the machine were painfully picking out the words.

Pike smiled, straightened up, and knocked sharply. There was no response, but the ticking ceased. He knocked again. The knocking reverberated through the empty corridor, but within there was no stir of life.

He waited another interval, then called sharply: "Is Mr. Dawson there?"

Shuffling steps began to approach the door. A querulous voice called: "The office is closed. Who is it?"

"Colonel Pike," was the answer. "It is important that I see Mr. Dawson."

The door opened a crack and an old man in the alpaca jacket of a bookkeeper peered through. "Are you Colonel Pike?"

"I am; you are Mr. Dawson?"

"Yes," was the answer. "What do you want?"

"I am a friend of Mr. Boyd's. I crossed

in the ship with him. I want to talk with you."

The door opened and Pike went in.

"Mr. Dawson," he said, "this is a very sad business and in a manner which I will explain I have an interest in it. Before we have our talk, if possible, I wish to see Mr. Boyd's private office, the room where he was this afternoon."

"You can see it," the old man answered.

At the end of a tortuous passage between ground-glass partitions he opened a door.

A Bokhara rug covered the floor. Three leather-covered chairs set in a semicircle faced a flat-topped desk. Behind this stood a swing-chair. On a coat-rack in the corner hung a summer overcoat and a black derby hat.

On the desk lay the dispatch-case that had hung from the hook in Boyd's cabin. It was unlocked. Pike examined it. It was empty.

On the wall space behind the desk-chair hung a large engraving of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. For the rest, the pictures were a dozen or more prints of old New York.

"Nothing has been done here, I suppose?" said Pike.

"Nothing, except that the window on the right has been closed."

Pike crossed to the window, glanced out, turned back and seated himself in the swinging desk-chair.

"You've been a long time with the firm, Dawson?" he asked.

"I was with them when they started business, twenty-two years ago," the old man answered.

"And as I understand it you stood in rather a confidential relation to Mr. Boyd?"

"That's true."

Pike's hand had been furtively searching the surfaces under the desk top. Suddenly his fingers closed upon a small object.

"Mr. Dawson," he said, "yesterday Mr. Boyd sent you instructions by wireless. You were told to have a certain apparatus installed, last night."

"Yes, sir."

"The switch I find under the desk. And here—" he rose and swung back the engraving from the wall, "is evidently the receiving mechanism."

The old man nodded.

"Does any one in the office know but you?"

"I don't see how they could," Dawson answered. "It was put in at night. The receiver is under my desk in my private office. I keep it locked."

"Good," said Pike. "Now, Dawson, do you know with whom Mr. Boyd expected to use this apparatus?"

The old man shook his head.

"Could you guess?"

"I have no idea."

"Yet you know," Pike continued, "that there was some one in with him this afternoon, some one that he must have admitted through the door into the corridor."

"Yes, I know that."

"And you have no idea who it was?"

"No."

"Mr. Boyd must have spoken to you about the dictagraph when he came to the office this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir, he asked me if it was installed and in working order. Then he said, 'Dawson, you understand how to keep the machine fed with fresh cylinders. As the records are made, put them away in their boxes and forget about the whole matter!"

"And that was all?"

"No, sir, he said if anything should happen to him I was to deliver the records to Colonel Pike. 'You can get his address from my niece, Miss Crewe,' he said. Those were the last words he ever spoke to any one in the outer office."

"So you knew who I was?"

"If I hadn't, you wouldn't have got in."

Pike smiled. "Suppose we see what you've got recorded. I fancy you were typewriting them off when I knocked."

"There is only one sir, only part of one," the old man answered.

"One may be enough. Sure you don't recognize the visitor's voice?"

Dawson shook his head. "They come out like squeaks; both of them, but of course Mr. Boyd's voice I know."

"And what they say, can you make anything of that?"

"It's nothing I know anything about."

They passed out and entered a partitioned-off space furnished with desks and typewriters for four stenographers. On a stand by one of the desks stood the office phonograph with a cylinder upon it, a third of it scored with the lines of the recording needle.

Pike gazed at it. Here at the end of an ocean-wide trail was the apparent verification of that message that had come unsought and unexpected through the woman in Clarjes Street. He adjusted the ear-pieces. "Set the thing going," he said.

Dawson swung the needle back to the beginning and threw the switch. Rough, scraping sounds assailed his ears, then words came abruptly in a metallic, insect-like voice:

"I'm sorry you used his name but we won't discuss that now. There's one thing that I want to get straightened out, and straightened out right away."

It was Boyd speaking. There was no doubt.

A grinding pause, then a second voice, toneless, mechanical, metallic as the first.

"What's that?"

"About the money that we paid over. It seems that none of it was found in his estate."

"You've got your voucher with his endorsement on it. I told you at the time that he bought a block of my bonds and endorsed your checks over to me. What he did with the bonds I don't know. All that concerns us is that we gave him the bonds."

"No, it isn't."

"What's the matter?"

"A good deal's the matter. We've got to face a show-down."

"Well, we'll have a show-down then! I've got all the receipts."

"I wish you'd let me have them."

"I will to-morrow."

"I want 'em to-night."

"I can't go into this matter now. I told you that when you telephoned and asked me to come in. I've got an appointment up-town at half-past four."

"Did Lassiter say anything to you about where he was going to keep his securities?"

"I don't think he did. Anyway I don't remember. Does the boy know it was I who made the payments?"

"He doesn't know anything about you, not yet; but I wish you'd get those receipts for me to-night."

"I tell you it's impossible to-night."

"You'll let me have them in the morning?"

"Yes, indeed." There was a grinding pause. "Say, Harry, did you ever see anything like this?"

Another grinding pause. "What is it?"

"Do you see the pearl light in it? Hold it this way. Now look."

The soft, hissing buzz of the mechanism went on but no more words came: Boyd had thrown the switch.

Pike stopped the machine and took out the ear-pieces.

"Can you make anything out of it?" asked Dawson.

Pike made no answer. He was gazing off across the typewriters to the ground-glass partition beyond. The revelation which Boyd had planned to have recorded had never been made. There was only this commonplace request for an explanation and the wholly natural promise to produce the papers in the morning. The visitor was on intimate terms with Boyd. He called him "Harry" as he turned to go and showed him some curious trifle with a pearl light in it. And save for the fact that the unknown speaker was identified as the surviving partner in the mine, that was all.

"Dawson," he said at last, "what time was this record made?"

"It finished at twenty minutes to four, sir. I heard the buzzing of the machine stop and I looked at my watch."

"No one heard or saw any one leaving the private office by the corridor about this time?"

"No, sir."

"And you have no idea who Mr. Boyd's visitor was?"

"No, sir, I might say I could make out Mr. Boyd's voice because I know it, but for the other—" he shook his head.

Pike rose. "You'd better say nothing about this. I'll see you again in a day or two."

"Yes, sir," said Dawson.

Five minutes later, with the typewritten transcript in his pocket, and carrying in his hand the cylinder in its wool-lined box, Pike again was threading the desolate cañon of Wall Street.

Those insect-like voices were sounding in his ears. As Dawson had said, there was no doubt about Boyd's. Despite its metallic tonelessness it was his. But the other? It was a distinctive voice with a cold, sardonic resonance which the mechancial reproduction but muted. And as Pike pondered it began to seem that he had heard the voice before. "Imagination," he muttered, yet the impression clung, waking haunting echoes that linked themselves to nothing.

The night-blue sky spread overhead suffused with the glow of the city's lights. A single star gleamed faintly. Again there came on Pike that awareness of something nebulous stirring in the depths of his consciousness, a subtle pressure as of some mind exerting its will to transmit thought. He stopped, gazing vacantly at the star. Then a policeman stepping from the shadows approached him and he went on toward the subway. The experience had passed, and he took the train northward struggling with his perplexity.

As they came into Forty-second Street Pike looked at his watch. It was quarter to eight. He realized that he was hungry. He got out, made his way to one of the cheap restaurants, ordered he knew not what and ate. A half-hour later the Madison Avenue street-car set him down at Boyd's street. He turned east, reading the house numbers. Toward the middle of the block a series of darkened doorways made him lose count. With his head turned toward the row of houses watching for lighted numerals he suddenly found himself in the path of a man apparently as abstracted as himself. He stepped aside, muttering an apology. The man faced about. Under the light of the street-lamp they looked at each other and the man passed on. For a moment Pike gazed after him, then continued eastward. The third house was Boyd's and he mounted the steps.

The butler admitted him. "They're just finishing dinner," he said. "Will you wait in the library?"

A wood fire burned low in the fireplace. Pike drew up a chair. He had hardly seated himself before Rivers came in.

"Miss Crewe will be down directly," he said.

"Everything all right?"

Rivers nodded. "Just before seven Feltner called."

Pike rose.

"He and a fat young gentleman named Gordon appeared with a quantity of white roses."

"You saw them?"

"Yes. They asked to see Miss Crewe and she had them shown in."

"Well?"

Rivers smiled significantly. "They were much shocked. It was a visit of condolence. They only stopped about five minutes."

"What sort of impression did Feltner make?"

"Strong chap, mentally, physically. Tall, spare, rat-like eyes, black mustache, well turned out, a man about sixty."

There was a rustle of silk and Mary Crewe came in.

"Rivers has been telling me about Mr. Feltner's visit," said Pike. "What do you make of him?"

"It's hard to tell," she answered. "It's not a sympathetic personality."

"Did he seem to have anything on his mind?"

"I should say he was upset. He said the news had upset him. He told us my uncle had been one of his best friends. He had known Mr. Andrews and Mr. Hopkins."

"He didn't discuss the case?"

"He said it was very terrible," said Rivers, "the three of them all going the same way, and very strange. That was all."

"He didn't mention having seen Mr. Boyd this afternoon?"

"No."

"Well," said Pike, "some one was with Mr. Boyd as late as twenty minutes to four, perhaps later."

"How do you know?" asked Rivers.

"I got the wax cylinder. It's a dictaphone record."

Rivers looked at him incredulously. "You mean that Clarjes Street business has come off?"

Pike jerked his thumb toward the pasteboard box on the table.

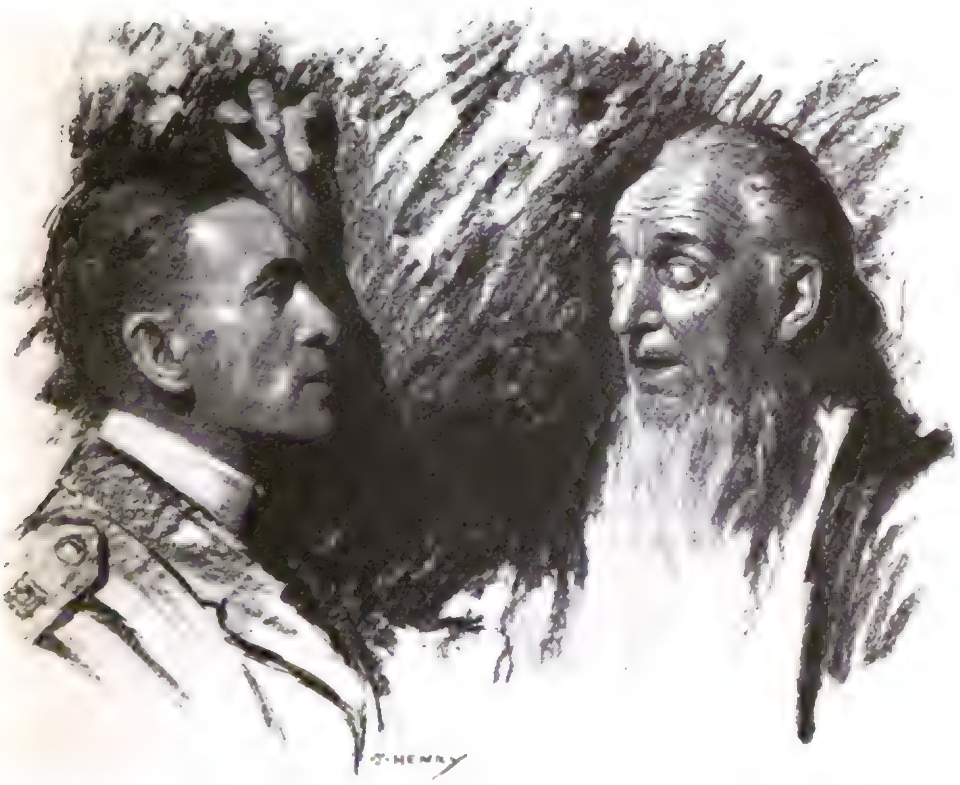
"The devil!" said Rivers.

Pike told of his visit to Dawson and gave them the typewritten transcript of the record.

They read it together under the reading-lamp.

"I don't see that this thing in itself amounts to much," said Rivers.

"It proves this," said Pike, "that the unknown partner in the mine was with Boyd not more than ten minutes before he fell out of the window, that he came in and went out by the private door on the corridor. It is significant that up to the present he has not thought fit to make his visit known."



Rivers was standing by the corner of the table looking dully ahead of him. Sibelius moved toward him, called sharply and made a downward pass with his hands.

"But there is no proof that he is trying to keep his visit secret. He might not have heard of it till after the office had closed. There would be no point in his rushing up here to Miss Crewe."

"A man who knew Boyd well enough to call him 'Harry' would have been pretty certain to have heard of it, and unless he had some reasons he would have been likely to communicate with some member of the family."

"He may already have communicated with Mr. Sibelius," said the girl.

Pike smiled. "It's possible. By the way, you were expecting Mr. Sibelius when I left. What did he have to say?"

"I haven't seen him," she answered. "He telephoned that he had been detained. Haskins says that he came while we were at dinner, but when he heard there was some one with me he wouldn't stay. He said he'd phone later."

"Well," said Pike, "the question is who was with your uncle just before the end. Was it the man who sent the cable, was it Feltner—or some one else?"

"Can one recognize the voices on the record?" asked Rivers.

"That is what I was coming to," said Pike. "You've heard Feltner talk." He looked at his watch. "Some up-town hotel must use one of these machines for dictation. Of course I could call on Mr. Feltner, but the easiest way——"

"I ought to be able to recognize his voice," said Rivers. "It was distinctive."

"Let's get a taxi, then, and settle it. We'll be back," he said to the girl, "perhaps in half an hour. You won't see any one?"

"No," she answered and smiled.

Pike took the box containing the cylinder and they went out.

MARY put wood on the fire, drew up a chair and tried to read. A half-hour passed. The fire burned low again; she put on another stick. A clock struck ten. They had been gone an hour. She rose, a little anxious. For something to do she thought to ring for mineral-water. Then she heard voices in the hall. The door opened and they both entered.

"I'm sorry we were late," said Pike. "We had a long chase."

"You found one?"

"We found one," said Rivers.

"Taking the cylinder out of the box," said Pike, "I dropped it. We have the pieces."

She gave a little cry.

"We'll have to get along without it," said Pike. "It's a pity. I'll have to see Feltner, that's all, and then bluff."

"But suppose it was he that was with my uncle, what can you do about it?"

"That's the difficulty," said Rivers. "Assume he admitted that he was there, there's nothing to prove that he sandbagged your uncle and dropped him out of the window. We don't know about the Andrews and Hopkins cases, but we know he couldn't have been in the room with Pike's father."

Pike said nothing. He had dropped into a chair and was sitting with his abstracted, far-away look.

"Why don't you go to Mr. Sibelius," she said, "and tell him the whole story? If any one knew about my uncle's affairs it would be apt to be he."

"Your uncle never would have told him about the mine and the tontine arrangement," said Rivers.

"He might have. I've only seen him once," she went on. "He dined with us when I was stopping with my uncle on my way to Europe, but he made an impression on me. He's a remarkable man. My advice would be to tell him the whole thing. Even if he didn't agree about its being murder, he surely could help in getting back the mine and the bullion."

"What does he do?" asked Pike.

"I think he used to be a lawyer. He's evidently rich, for he collects books and pictures."

"Does he live near by?"

"No; in Brooklyn."

"Did your uncle talk about him as if he saw a good deal of him?"

"I don't recall his talking about him very much one way or the other," she answered, "but I have the impression that he was on very good terms with him. You see they grew up together. My grandfather Boyd married his mother when he was a child. She only lived a few months and then my grandfather married my grandmother. Uncle Henry was their first child. Sibelius lived with them till he grew up. After that I don't know; I, believe, though, that he only came to New York twelve or fifteen years ago."

"Unless he knows about the mine he couldn't help much," said Pike.

"But I believe he'd know," the girl insisted. "He's eccentric, but he's a very intelligent man. I know my uncle trusted him."

"How eccentric?" asked Rivers.

"He's a strange-looking creature, always wears blue goggles and a weird fringe of white beard."

"I met a man with a beard like that," said Pike "as I was coming in this evening, but he had no goggles."

"He was here just before you came," she said. "I dare say at night he doesn't wear the goggles."

"Well," said Pike, "it may be the best thing to do. Under the circumstances, perhaps it's the only thing."

The telephone on the table beside him rang shrilly. He leaned over and picked up the instrument.

"Yes, this is Mr. Boyd's house," he said. "Yes, she's here. Who is this, please? Just a moment—" He turned to the girl.

She looked at him and started. "Is anything wrong?"

"No," said Pike slowly. "Mr. Sibelius wants to speak to you." The voice of Sibelius was the voice on the record.

She shot him a questioning look and went to the instrument.

"Yes, I'm all right. Yes, Haskins told me. I'm sorry you didn't wait. Major Rivers was with me. He and Colonel Pike were on the ship with us. Are you getting any rest? But you must get some sleep." The conversation went on for a minute or two, then gave signs of drawing to an end. "Will you hold the line a moment?" she asked. She turned to Pike, covering the transmitter with her hand. "Have you decided?"

"Yes," Pike answered. "Ask him if he'll see me to-morrow morning."

She turned back to the telephone. "Colonel Pike is here. Uncle Henry talked to him about some matters on board ship. He wants to know if he can see you to-morrow. Any time, morning or afternoon. Yes, that will do. I'll be in all day. You might telephone when you are coming. Take care of yourself. Good night." She hung up. "He'll see you to-morrow morning at half-past nine," she said.

Pike was standing, gazing into the fire. "If Sibelius is the man I passed in the street with the white beard," he said, "I've seen him before."

"Where?"

"In New Mexico, years ago."

"Do you think he'll remember you?"

"No. He was on the stage; I was in the audience. He was lecturing."

"I never knew he had been a lecturer," she said.

Pike looked at his watch. "I think we ought to be going," he said to Rivers. "Mary ought to turn in. This has been a hard day."

"I'm not tired."

"You ought to be," he answered. "Besides, we've got some thinking to do. We've got to present our case to Sibelius as well as possible. At present it's like a picture-puzzle, with some of the most important pieces missing. We've got to guess somewhat exactly how Mr. Feltner fits in."

"But you must get some sleep, too."

"Don't worry about that," he answered. They said good night and left. As they reached the sidewalk Rivers filled his lungs with air and looked up at the star-sown heavens.

"Glorious night," he said; "suppose we walk."

"Good idea," Pike answered, and they turned west toward Fifth Avenue.

IT WAS three o'clock the next morning when Rivers waked with a start. He dreamed he had been shot. He sat up and listened with relief to the motor that was back-firing in the street below. Then he consulted his watch, composed himself and was about to pull up the bedclothes again when he noticed a thread of light under Pike's door. Pike must have fallen asleep with the lights on. A second thought told him that this was unlikely. It wasn't the kind of thing Pike would do. A vague fear that the room was empty began to prey upon him. He wanted to call out, but something held him back. He was afraid.

The glimmer of light shone steadily. At last he got out of bed and made his way over the carpeted floor to the door. He listened, but heard nothing. Instead of opening the door his hand searched for the keyhole and closed upon the key. He drew it out noiselessly and, kneeling, peered through the hole.

At the centertable under the blaze of the chandelier Pike was sitting upright. His eyes were bandaged. His hands lay upon the table as if he were playing chess, but there was no board, nor pieces. Only the box, with pieces of the cylinder, stood upon the table.

Rivers watched wonderingly. He began to understand. Pike was putting together the puzzle, inventing the missing pieces, reconstructing the picture out of his inner consciousness. Pike's own theory of his achievement with the German cypher Rivers had never accepted. He held that Pike possessed phenomenal powers of abstract thought. Where others could follow a problem for minutes, Pike kept on for hours, framing one solution after another till the right one came. Yet now he began to doubt his own conviction. Pike faced him. The glaring light showed his large features relaxed and calm. There was the passivity of sleep rather than the intensity of prolonged mental effort. He was a man waiting, a sensitive receiver for what might come, rather than a seeker.

Rivers rose and crept back to bed with a sense of having witnessed strange phenomena. Conceivably that mysterious subconsciousness of Pike's was extending its antennæ into a plane where friendly intelligences could feel it with the information that it sought. At all events he was jolly glad that Pike was alive and sitting there.

When he next waked the sun was streaming into the room. Pike had drawn the curtains and was standing by his bed. "It's eight o'clock," he said.

Rivers sat up. "What were you doing in there all night? I waked about three, saw the light under the door. You gave me a scare—thought you'd gone out of the window. Then I used the keyhole and saw you sitting up, blindfolded."

"I seem to get things better that way—as if I were playing chess."

"Have you got any new ideas?"

"You'll see when we tell it to Sibelius. We've got to hurry. Order me some breakfast. I've got to shave."

He was back again, dressed, in half an hour, and began to eat. As he finished his coffee he looked at his watch. "We ought to be starting," he said. "Have you got a gun?"

Rivers shook his head. "Are we going on to Feltner's?"

"It's a possibility." He disappeared into his own room and came back with Mary Crewe's automatic.

Rivers took the weapon gingerly. "I hate these things," he said. "However, this one is empty."

"Empty?"

"Did you never find that out?"

Pike took the pistol and examined it. His great frame began to shake. "I ought not to be allowed loose," he said. "Come on, we'll be late."

Half an hour later the taxicab stopped before a large, rather shabby brownstone house in the Prospect Heights district of Brooklyn. Pike led the way up the steps and rang the bell.

A well-turned-out man servant opened the door. "We have an appointment with Mr. Sibelius," said Pike. "Major Rivers and Colonel Pike."

The man ushered them into the drawing-room and disappeared.

Rivers gave an exclamation as he glanced about the room. "Look at the things this old creature has collected!"

"Are they any good?"

"Any good? My dear man, every single thing is a museum piece. Look at his pictures! There's a Bordone; that's a Tintoretto; there's a Bellini. Look at the Louis-Quatorze chairs and the cabinet!" His rapturous examination was cut short by the return of the man servant.

"Mr. Sibelius will receive you in the library," he said. He led them out through the passage to a large room built out over the back yard and running the thirty-foot width of the house. Through the south windows the sun streamed in, showing the walls lined to the ceiling with books in fine bindings, old or new. A full-length portrait of a Venetian grandee, another Bordone, hung over a fifteenth-century fireplace. Rivers saw no more, for the master of the house, seated behind a large Venetian table used evidently as his work desk, had risen and was advancing.

In spite of his grotesque beard and goggles the man gave an impression of great force. He had the long mobile face of an actor. The skin was smooth. He seemed much younger than the beard would indicate. Even masked with the blue lenses his eyes seemed keen and searching.

"I see you have an appreciative sense of the Venetians," observed Rivers.

"A great people," he answered shortly. He seated them ceremoniously and returned to his place behind the desk-like table.

"Have you seen Mary this morning?" He spoke to Pike.

"I called her on the telephone about eight," Pike answered.

"She was well?"

"She seemed to be."

There was a silence.

"I understand," said Sibelius, "that you knew my stepbrother on the steamer; that you wish to discuss some matter that concerned him."

"That is it exactly," said Pike. "You see it happened," said Pike, "that I was with Mr. Boyd when he read the wireless bulletin of Mr. Andrews's death. He was greatly unstrung. Subsequently he made certain confidences which I think should be brought to your attention."

"I see," said Sibelius.

"It is possible, of course," Pike added, "that he may have communicated with you directly, but I assume from the newspaper account that you reached his office too late."

Sibelius nodded.

"Stated baldly," Pike continued, "Mr. Boyd was in fear of his life. He believed that both Hopkins and Andrews had been murdered."

"This is a somewhat startling announcement," said Sibelius.

"It is; yet, surely, Mr. Sibelius, you can not have considered this sequence of tragedies without some disquieting speculation."

"To be quite frank, Colonel Pike, I have indulged in not a little disquieting speculation. I am far from accepting the hypothesis of accident. But on the other hand, the possibility of murder has never occurred to me."

"What then is your theory?"

"It is purely a theory," Sibelius said slowly, "but it seems likely that my stepbrother and his partners have been the victims of some outrageous blackmail. Some scoundrel has obtained a hold upon them and has hounded them to suicide."

"You have no knowledge of any facts to support this?"

"As I told you, it was only a theory, but at least it is possible if not probable."

"Whereas you consider the hypothesis of murder impossible?"

"My dear sir," said Sibelius, "what my stepbrother may have based his suspicions upon, in the case of Mr. Hopkins and Mr. Andrews, I do not know. At one time he believed or stated that he believed that Hopkins killed himself. But consider the facts in his own case. He was alone in his office, the door locked, his office force within call. I myself was sitting outside within thirty feet of him. Assuming that an assailant might have entered through the door on the corridor, a man does not submit to being thrown from a high window without resistance. There were no signs of a struggle, no noise, no outcry."

"But suppose there was no assailant present at the time of the murder?"

Both Sibelius and Rivers regarded him blankly.

"Do you imply some mechancial device?" asked Sibelius.

"This crime was committed in a very extraordinary manner," Pike replied, "and by a very extraordinary criminal, but there was no mechanical device."

"Are you entirely serious?" asked Sibelius.

"Entirely."

"Colonel Pike," said Sibelius, "I was not aware that you had come with a theory of your own. It is evident that your intentions are the best, but even so, you can hardly expect me to listen patiently to this kind of nonsense."

"Nevertheless," said Pike, "I am going to ask you to listen. It is possible that in five minutes I may be able to arouse your interest."

The gaze of the two men met. "Suit yourself," said Sibelius.

"As I have said," continued Pike, "this is an unusual crime, committed in an unusual manner. To make its nature clear it is necessary to go back some years. About fifteen years ago, I believe it was during the winter of 1904, I attended the public performance of an itinerant mesmerist in Albuquerque."

An ironic smile parted Sibelius's lips. "You are going back," he observed.

"This man, who styled himself grotesquely 'The Great Diavolo,' " continued Pike, ignoring the interruption, "possessed hypnotic powers of an extraordinary nature. Twice during his performance, as he called for volunteers, his glance caught mine, and it was with difficulty that I fought down the impulse to rush to the stage."

"Are you preparing to tell me that Mr. Boyd was hypnotized and commanded to throw himself out of the window?"

"Exactly that," said Pike.

Sibelius laughed. "Really, Colonel Pike, this is fantastic. You must know that such a thing would be impossible. I have made some study of the literature of hypnotism. The books unanimously lay down the proposition that a hypnotized subject will *not* obey suggestions contrary to the instinct of self-preservation."

"I shall tell you what I saw," Pike answered. "You can draw your own conclusions. The performer began with the usual demonstrations. A subject was told that a walking-stick was a rattlesnake; that a piece of ice was a live coal. A cowboy friend of mine was handed an old envelope and told that it was a thousand-dollar bill. It was obvious that his delusion was complete."

"A man might be given waste paper and accept it as government securities?" put in Rivers.

"Exactly," said Pike.

Sibelius smiled.

"The performer went on to another class of phenomena," Pike continued. "He set two carpenter's saw-horses about five feet apart and parallel one with the other. He then took four subjects, hypnotized to rigidity, and laid them on the trestle, their heads resting on one and their heels on the other. On these he laid four more crosswise. He then took a third four and piled them across the second tier. After that he vaulted to the top of the pile and stood for a minute or more bowing to the audience. He called this the 'human log-pile.' As you can see, the bottom men were each supporting upward of three hundred and fifty pounds. Now, the strongest of these men in a normal state could hardly hold himself in that position for thirty seconds, let alone support a weight. It would seem to me that submission to three hundred and fifty pounds on one's stomach while stretched three feet above the floor is at variance with the instinct of self-preservation. But the next act is more directly in point.

"The performer assembled the same dozen men whom he had used in his human log-pile. He directed them to go to the gallery back of the seats. 'Now,' he said, 'you are a mill-pond held back by a dam. In just three minutes that dam will go out, the stream will rush down through the stage-box and tumble down in a cataract to the stage.'

"He took out his watch and explained to the audience the curious time-sense of hypnotic subjects. An order given to do a certain thing hours afterward is obeyed to the second. Well, in exactly three minutes those twelve men came rushing down through the box and dived head first to the stage, a matter of ten feet. Now the point is, that one man broke his shoulder-blade, though this was not known till the next day, when the professor had left town."

"Extraordinary and very interesting," said Sibelius, "and, one must admit, somewhat at variance with the view usually held by scientists. But, granting, for the sake of argument, that a hypnotized subject might be made to hurl himself from a window, what reason is there to suppose that anything of the sort has taken place?"

"We are coming to that——"

"I do not wish to interrupt," Sibelius broke in. "I am naturally more interested than you in unraveling the mystery of my brother's death, if there is a mystery, but as a lawyer I must ask for something in the nature of evidence rather than reminiscence. Have you any facts that prove a crime? As must be obvious, Colonel Pike, all motive for murder is utterly lacking. If I have been correctly informed by my stepbrother, his chief heir is Miss Crewe. She is the only person who could benefit by his death. If indeed, as I suggested, there had been blackmail, the motive for murder is conspicuously lacking. A dead man is of no use to a blackmailer."

"The motive for all three crimes," said Pike, "was robbery."

"You believe you can prove this?"

"I know that I can."

"Pray proceed, Colonel Pike," said Sibelius. He leaned back in his chair.

"I must lay the facts before you in my own way," said Pike, "and I must ask your indulgence if I resort again to reminiscence. The man whose demonstrations I have described was no ordinary mountebank. He was a man of education, of ambition, of an inflexible will, and as bereft of moral sensibility as a man may be. He began to ask himself why he should employ his extraordinary powers to make a precarious living. Whether he had studied law before he began his career as a mesmerist I do not know, but I know that about fifteen years ago the 'Great Diavolo' disappeared. About the same time a very extraordinary man opened a law office in New York."

"Do you imply that this particular hypnotist is involved in the death of my stepbrother?" Sibelius demanded.

"Be patient a moment longer," Pike answered. "On his becoming established in New York through the introductions of a relative, he endeavored to cultivate rich clients rather than general practise. I infer that he succeeded. Several of these clients are now dead and their estates on being settled were smaller than might have been expected. Meanwhile the lawyer grew rich.

"As a precaution against being recognized as the itinerant showman several changes were instituted. As 'the Great Diavolo' he was smooth shaven, with a strong, well-modeled jaw and chin. As the lawyer he wore a grotesque beard which with chemical assistance was prematurely white. The hypnotist had been notable for his eyes, eyes so unusual that the average man felt uncomfortable when they turned on him. The lawyer had developed an eye trouble which necessitated his wearing blue goggles —in public. It is probable that none of his clients ever saw his uncovered eyes but once."

Sibelius raised his hand. "I think this farce has gone far enough," he said quietly. "You have played your little piece with effect, Colonel Pike, but has it got you anywhere?" He removed his spectacles.

Rivers, who had been watching him breathlessly, averted his eyes.

"I should say that we were on the way," said Pike.

"Let us see," said Sibelius. He tapped the desk thoughtfully with an ivory paper-cutter. "It is possible that you could prove that Sibelius, the lawyer, had once been a traveling hypnotist. Well what of it? I deny all your implied charges. I do not even admit that Sibelius was ever the person you have described as the 'Great Diavolo.' The burden of proof is on you. You may note in passing," he added, "that I am waiving my right to 'virtuous indignation.' We are men of at least average intelligence; it is better to discuss the matter reasonably."

"That would be my idea," said Pike.

"Well," said Sibelius, "assume for the sake of argument that everything you imagine were true; what can you do about it?"

"In this state they electrocute," said Pike.

Sibelius laughed. "I like frank people; Colonel Pike, you and I are anachronisms in this soft-spoken age." His eyes strayed to the portrait over the fireplace and a strange melancholy came into them. "But to come back to our muttons," he said, straightening himself in his chair. "Pike, you are wasting your time—and mine. Let us do something mutually profitable. Will you inspect my collections? Will you stay to lunch? I have some excellent Chablis."

"I am afraid our engagements will prevent," said Pike.

"Then without offense, gentlemen, I must tell you that I am somewhat occupied this morning." He rose.

Pike remained seated.

"As you please," he said. He resumed his chair. "This must be dull for Major Rivers. If he cares for the morning paper——?"

"No thanks," said Rivers in a matter-of-fact tone.

"You can see," said Pike, "that from my point of view it is merely a question of how to proceed. As a layman I should prefer the opinion of a lawyer before submitting my evidence to the district attorney."

"I quite understand," said Sibelius. "If my professional opinion is of value to you, it is at your service."

"I shall be brief," said Pike. "Motive, of course, is established by the tontine arrangement by which the mine passed to the ultimate survivor. Boyd explained that to me himself."

Sibelius tapped the desk sharply with his paper-knife. "Conversation with a dead man, Colonel Pike—inadmissible as evidence. Proceed."

"The robbery and murder of my father is of course a separate crime," Pike continued, "but the attending circumstances would be relevant as establishing motive."

"Correct," said Sibelius, "if such evidence exists."

"Boyd's voucher exists," said Pike, "there is also testimony as to the packet of waste-paper slips which my father accepted as bonds."

Sibelius smiled. "Naturally I am ignorant of what you are talking about, but what do they prove? The voucher is a receipt for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of government bonds delivered by Sibelius to Lassiter. Would a jury believe that a man would write such an indorsement on the back of a check without actually receiving the bonds?"

"It might if it had previously been shown that Sibelius had made a man accept an old envelope for a one-thousand-dollar bill."

"Moonshine," said Sibelius. "Any district attorney would tell you so. No prosecuting officer would have the face to take such a case to the grand jury."

"Possibly," said Pike, "but we are only beginning. There is the packet of letters and cables sent by Sibelius under the name of Feltner. Aside from their bearing on the conspiracy they show that Sibelius used the name of Boyd's friend to cover his activities. It is circumstantial evidence, but it is significant."

"You have those letters?"

"Only copies. As you must know, the originals were taken yesterday afternoon from Boyd's office."

"Don't say, 'as I must know,' " Sibelius objected. "I know nothing. I am hearing the brief of your evidence as your lawyer. If you believe the letters you speak of bear upon the murder of Henry Boyd and you can show that they were in reality sent by Sibelius, though signed 'Feltner,' you could probably get the copies introduced. But they would carry no more weight than your personal testimony. If you were a district attorney would you rely very much on such a packet of copies made by an interested witness?"

"Still," said Pike quietly, "you must remember that all this is to be taken in connection with proof that Sibelius was closeted with Boyd a few minutes before his death."

Sibelius' eyes contracted to points. "I believe the facts show that Sibelius was in the outer office at that time," he said.

"The testimony shows that Sibelius came into the outer office about three-forty-five and inquired for his stepbrother. It is important, as you can see, for it establishes the fact that Sibelius pretended not to have seen Boyd since his return."

"Nor had he!" cried Sibelius harshly. "I'll tell you that emphatically."

"We are coming now to that," said Pike. He drew from his breast-pocket a document, half a dozen sheets in thickness, and unfolded it deliberately.

Rivers from where he sat could see that the top sheet was blank.

"To refresh your memory, Mr. Sibelius," Pike went on, "I will read extracts from that last conversation which you had with your stepbrother." He slipped the blank sheet off and placed it at the back of the pile. He did likewise with the second, giving the impression of a somewhat lengthy document. He then held before him the typewritten transcript which Dawson had made.

"Boyd is speaking," he began. "He says, 'I'm sorry you used his name but we won't discuss that now. There's one thing that I want to get straightened out right away.' "

Pike paused and added, "You see the reference to the Feltner signature?"

Sibelius sat motionless, his face an evil mask.

"To continue," said Pike. "Sibelius asks 'what's that?'

"Boyd—'About the money that we paid over. It seems that none of it was found in the estate.'

"Sibelius—'You've got your voucher with his indorsement on it. I told you at the time that he bought a block of my bonds and indorsed your checks over to me. What Lassiter did with the bonds I don't know. All that concerns us is that we gave him the bonds.' "

Pike paused again.

"Well?" said Sibelius.

Pike rose. "Did you ever see anything like this?" He stepped to the table and took from an ash-tray a crystal ball the size of a marble. "Do you see the pearl light in it? Hold it this way! Now look!"

Sibelius held up his hand. "Dictagraph, eh?" A bitter smile parted his lips. "Well, Colonel Pike—" He broke off and sat gazing vacantly before him.

The silence lengthened.

"I suppose I'm through," he said at last. "You've been too many for me, Pike. The game is over." He leaned back, his hands dropped in his lap. As the silence drew out Pike became aware that his right hand was stealthily opening a drawer. He sprang forward, flanking the desk on the left. At the same instant Rivers covered Sibelius with the automatic. They saw then that he was endeavoring to uncork a small brown bottle.

Pike was on him and had his wrist. For a moment he struggled, then suddenly relapsed into his chair.

"Why not?" he said looking up into Pike's face. "There's nothing to be gained by scandal."

"All that is true," said Pike, "but you're in too much of a hurry. You forget I want the mine or the purchase money."

"I suppose that is reasonable," Sibelius muttered. "I can't give you the money. I haven't got it. As for the mine, it stands in your father's name. For our own reasons we never recorded the deeds. They are in the safe-deposit vault with the bullion. What terms will you make?"

"Give me a bill of sale to the contents and an assignment of your lease of the vault. In return you will have your bottle and till four o'clock to use it. If you fail, we call in the police."

There was a silence. Then Sibelius nodded. "I agree," he said.

Ten minutes later the documents were drawn, signed and witnessed by Rivers. Sibelius called up the manager of the trust company and explained the transfer of the lease of the vault.

"And now the keys," said Pike.

Sibelius pressed the button on the table and the butler came.

"Robbins," he said, "go to my room, please, and bring down the two keys that are on a ring in the right-hand drawer of my dressing-table."

The man went out. As he closed the door behind him he left it ajar. Pike flashed a suspicious glance at Sibelius.

"Robbins is of an inquiring turn of mind," said Sibelius. He rose as if to close the door, but Pike anticipated him. He went without haste, satisfied himself that the man was not there and shut the door again. The thing had taken fifteen seconds at most. As he turned back into the room he saw Rivers moving toward Sibelius like a sleep-walker, with the automatic pistol in his hand.

No word was spoken. Spellbound Pike watched the dumb show. Sibelius had the pistol. He advanced, tense, crouched forward, a faint smile on his lips. Six feet distant he pulled. The hammer snapped harmlessly. He recoiled a step, drew back the bolt mechanism and aiming carefully pulled again.

"It's empty," said Pike.

Sibelius stood gazing at him, weighing the chances of a hand-to-hand encounter. Hate and despair, the blind will to live prompted it. Reason showed its futility. Suddenly he dropped his hands. His arms hung inert. The pistol slipped to the floor.

"You'd better wake Rivers up," said Pike.

Rivers was standing by the corner of the table looking dully ahead of him. Sibelius moved toward him, called sharply and made a downward pass with his hand. Rivers blinked, yawned, looked about and sat down.

Pike picked up the pistol and slipped it into his pocket.

A moment later the man servant entered, delivered the keys to Sibelius and withdrew.

Sibelius thoughtfully handed them to Pike. "This one is apt to stick," he said.

Pike took the keys and slipped them into his trousers pocket. Then he placed the little bottle on the table beside a bowl of roses. "I think we understand each other," he said.

Sibelius nodded. "I have till four."

"Exactly," said Pike. He bowed, turned to Rivers and beckoned. Rivers rose and followed him out. The taxi in which they had come was waiting at the curb. Pike gave the driver his directions and they got in.

"What happened?" asked Rivers as the cab started. "I felt as if I had been asleep."

Pike told him. After that they were silent again.

They crossed the Brooklyn bridge and turned down into the financial district. The vehicle stopped in front of the Atlantic Trust Company and they went in. No difficulty was raised. The lease of the vault was formally transferred to John B. Lassiter. The official rang for a messenger and they were conducted down to the vaults. The custodian used his master-key and withdrew. Pike inserted one of the duplicate keys that Sibelius had surrendered and the door swung open. They passed in and Pike switched on the light.

Rivers was the first to speak. "It's here," he said.

Gold bars in canvas bags lay piled on the floor. Pike opened one and dumped the contents.

They stood gazing at the treasure. "There's your Blaughton castle!" said Pike at last.

Rivers surveyed it thoughtfully. "It's odd," he muttered. "I always thought if I suddenly got a pot of money I'd be elated."

"I'm afraid that's life," said Pike with a dry laugh. "We don't live on gold bars. Come on."

THE French clock in the reception-room of Boyd's house struck one with the muffled tone of a far-away bell. Pike paused. He had finished telling the story of the morning.

"And there you are," he said.

Mary Crewe was silent for a time. Then she rose with a restless impulse, replaced a spray of freesia that was drooping from the vase and stood with her back to the fireplace. "How do you account for it all?" she said. "I don't mean what happened this morning, but the whole thing?"

"I don't account for it," Pike answered.

"But what do you think? What is your theory of it? You must have believed in the message that came through the Clarjes street woman."

"It seems to me something very simple, entirely natural. One wants to help one's friends. Suppose I was a blind man crossing the street. You see a motor-car bearing down on me. You take my arm and guide me to the sidewalk."

"But you assume that they are all alive and about us."

"It would be strange if they were not."

"Perhaps," she said. "And when you seem to listen and have things come to you?"

"That is only what every one does who creates anything. Somewhere all knowledge must exist. It is only a question of opening the channels to let it through. Perhaps," he went on, "the mind is evolving as millions of years ago the eye evolved. At first it was but a speck of pigment, dully sensitive to light. Perhaps the mind which to-day may open uncertainly small pores to the thought which fills the universe will develop a receiving organ. It is all reasonable. There is fundamentally no mystery about it."

She made no answer.

"There is only one mystery," he went on, "that I can not imagine being solved by a better knowledge of physics, or by more highly organized perceptions."

"And that?"

"The insoluble mystery is you," he replied. "You are the answer to everything John Lassiter wants in this world and the next. Why is it?"

She stood facing him with her grave eyes fixed on his. Her breath was coming fast, but she smiled. "I suppose," she said, "it is because you are a very foolish and a very lovable man, John."

"Don't you think it is about time to be foolish?" he asked. He rose and went toward her.

"I am sure of it," she answered.

The Nymph to Her Mortal Lover

By Mary Stewart Cutting

WOULD you clasp me once more, dear,
Lover, O Lover, come soon!
For I will vanish from here
At the full of the moon.

I go, ere the summer's flood,
Into the beckoning gloom.
I am here now the roses bud
But not when the roses bloom.

You may glimpse me then in the breeze
That blows at dawn from afar,
Or hear me in murmuring trees,
Or see my smile in a star,

But you can not hold me close!
You never can feel me speak
In the warmth of the joy that grows
With your cheek against my cheek.

When we cling to kiss, and part
Only to kiss again,
I will mean no more to your heart
Than does the falling rain.

The path through the wood shines clear—
O Lover, come to me soon!
For never again may I await you here
Ere the full of the moon.

Between a Daughter with a Will, a Mate with a "Nerve," and a Storm, the Skipper—well—

Sea Love

By Carl Clausen

Illustrations by B. G. Rosenmeyer

THE schooner was an old one and unsafe. But he and the girl back yonder had quarreled. He was tired of girls anyhow, and he had his mate's certificate in his pocket, so why not use it? Bob Neal dropped his bundle of blankets on the wharf and tossed a coin to decide which it was to be.

"Heads—I go back," he said. "Tails—I go with the *Lily*."

The shilling spun in the air, struck the wharf and dropped through a crack in the planking. He heard the soft splash as the coin struck the muddy water under the wharf.

It was only a shilling, so it didn't matter, even though it was his last one. Besides he had half-way decided in favor of the *Lily* before flipping the coin. So he signaled the boatman at the foot of the wharf to take him out to the schooner riding at anchor on the bay.

Five minutes later he clambered over the rusty black bulwarks of the *Lily* and tossed his blankets on deck.

A girl came out of the companionway hatch—a dark-haired girl with eyes that were darker than her hair and full red lips. She wore a white sailor middy. A small rhinestone comb gleamed in the dark coils of her hair.

"I'm the new mate," Bob said.

"Dad's ashore," she said. "Come on down an' I'll show you your cabin."

Bob picked up his bundle and prepared to follow her, when the boatman craned his neck over the bulwarks and demanded his pay.

" 'Arf a crown!" the man growled. "An' I carn't stay here all the bloomin' dye. 'Ave a 'eart."

Bob stuck his finger in his vest pocket, and glanced at the girl sheepishly. "I'm afraid I'm broke. I was to get a month's advance money, you know."

The girl looked at him scornfully for a moment. Producing a purse from the bosom of her middy, she tossed half a crown to the boatman.

Then she reproached Bob. "You sailors are all alike. Always broke. And I bet you're twenty-five if you're a day."

"What has age got to do with being broke?" Bob demanded.

"Some people get sense by that time." She paused. "Come on," she said briefly.

He followed her down the companionway hatch.

"That's your cabin," the girl said, pointing to a door on the right. "Make yourself at home."

"I always do," he answered.

She shot him a quick glance. "I don't think you and I are going to get along."

"I don't think so, either. I just got through with one. She was black-headed the same as you."

"You quarreled?"

"*She* did," Bob interposed virtuously.

She looked at him in silence for a moment. "I don't blame her," she said. "You've got red hair and a square jaw. Sure sign of cussedness. You should pick a girl with oval cheeks. They've got an even disposition. You need something to offset that streak of cussedness."

He leaned against the door-jamb and surveyed her cheeks critically. They were oval. "Is it an invitation?" he asked.

"It is not!"

"Too bad," he sighed.

She ignored this remark with a question. "Your first trip as mate?"

"What if it is?"

"The *Lily* is no cinch to handle. You'll have your hands full."

"Ships and women are alike," he commented. "You've got to nurse 'em along."

AT DUSK Captain Bloom came aboard and immediately approached the stranger. "I'm Neal, the new mate," Bob said.

Captain Bloom nodded. He was huge, blond and broad-shouldered. His heavy face was crisscrossed with little fine wrinkles. Bob decided that the girl took after her mother.

"You're pretty young," said the skipper.

"Blame it on my father," said Bob. "I know how to handle a ship."

"You'll need to."

"Why don't you tie a belly-band around 'er?" Bob said. "She looks like she was ready to fall apart."

"Got cold feet, eh?"

"Cap," said Bob, "the only time I've had cold feet in my life was when I stowed frozen mutton on the 'tween-decks of the *Tarrawera*."

"Hm," said Captain Bloom. "Better turn in, Neal. We go out on the four-o'clock tide to-morrow morning."

"I'll take a look around and locate the running-gear before I turn in. I like to know where to lay my hands on a rope when I want it in a hurry," Bob answered.

The *Lily* was pounding northward along the barrier reef in a moonlit sea a week later. Bob was sitting on the skylight picking softly on his mandolin. It was his watch below. The melody was "Old Dog Tray." Rose came out of the cabin and sat down on the skylight beside him.

"Why do you play that old tune?" she asked.

"I don't want to start anything sentimental with a woman aboard," he explained. "I'm playing safe."

"Conceit!" she scoffed.

"Nope! Self-defense."

"How?"

"Harry, the cook, told me what happened to Gordon, the former mate."

"Gordon was a brute. He tried to kiss me. Dad had to do it."

"All men are brutes to the woman who don't want their kisses."

She bit her lip and looked astern in silence at the phosphorescent wake of the schooner.

"I don't aim to have my facial beauty spoiled," he murmured. "The girl back yonder is a stickler for looks. She'd object to a flat map on the south end of the breakfast-table."

"You're thinking of going back to her?"

"I expect there'll be a letter for me when we get to Duralong," he parried.

"And if there isn't?"

"There will be."

"More conceit."

"Wrong again. Psychology."

"You hate yourself, don't you?"

"Well, no. Can't say that I do."

"Well, I do!"

"Why should you hate yourself?" he asked deprecatingly. "You're better looking than most."

She bit her lip again. He had a maddening way of turning her observations against herself.

"If you want a girl to like you, you should cultivate the manners of a gentleman," she observed.

"If I did, I probably should."

"I meant the girl back home."

"So did I."

"Oh!"

"The manners to be cultivated are—what, for instance?" he asked gently.

"Such simple things as removing your cap when you come into the cabin in my presence. Women appreciate the little courtesies."

"If she were here, I probably should. Being that she's something like a thousand miles from here, I consider it'd be plumb wasted energy. Besides it's just lounge-lizard tricks. I'm no lounge lizard."

"And then when we're at the table you might pass me the dishes before helping yourself," she went on.

"Would she not tear him into shreds, and mold him nearer to her heart's desire," he quoted irrelevantly.

"Beast!" she snorted. She arose and walked over to the railing and stood there with her back turned to him.

"She's gentle, she's kind,
I'll never, never find—"

he sang, twanging the strings of the mandolin and keeping time with his foot on the deck.

With a shrug of her shoulders the girl turned on her heel and went below. He watched her through the open skylight, sitting reading in the canvas chair under the lamp swinging from the deck-beam over her head. The light of the lamp threw soft shadows upon her face. Her dark hair was lustrous and warm in the golden light. He sighed audibly. The girl looked up.

"Too bad she's got a mean disposition," he said loudly.

She arose, closed the book with a bang, threw it on the table and went into her cabin.

Bob crossed on tiptoe to the starboard railing and looked over the side. The porthole of her cabin was open. He flung his right leg across the railing and with his back against the shrouds sang Drigo's "Serenade," accompanying himself softly on the mandolin. At the second stanza she shut the porthole with a bang. When he launched into the "Miserere" a moment later, he heard her open it again stealthily. He laughed softly.

"I thought that would fetch her," he murmured.

A week later the *Lily* was becalmed in the doldrums. Captain Bloom was fuming and fretting at the delay. The old schooner lay chafing her sails in against the rusty backstays. She rolled and pitched on the glass-smooth swells that threatened at every roll to dismast her.

Not a breath of wind stirred. The pitch in her deck-seams bubbled in the fierce heat of the tropic sun, which sank at night in a burst of livid flame and rose again hours too soon.

Captain Bloom was in a tantrum. He had to take it out on some one. The handiest one was his mate. Bob was in the cabin bending over the chart with the compasses when the skipper jumped him.

"Your watch on deck, Neal, I believe," he growled. "I'll attend to the laying out of the course."

"I'll have it figured out in a minute, Cap," Bob answered.

"Go on deck!" the skipper thundered.

Bob laid down the compasses and stared at Captain Bloom. "What's eating you?" he inquired.

Captain Bloom's pale-blue eyes narrowed angrily. "Get out!" he roared, pointing to the companionway-ladder.

Bob looked at him thoughtfully for a moment. Then he walked slowly up the ladder and on deck.

A few minutes later Rose came amidships to where he was working on the tarpaulin of the main hatch.

"The little boy had to mind," she taunted.

Bob gritted his teeth. "The little boy is not in the business of manufacturing orphans," he said. "I'd hate to see you in a checked gingham apron and pigtails."

"Don't mind me," she retorted. "Go right after him. It'd do you both good."

"Do you mean that?" Bob said.

"Certainly," she answered cheerfully. "Only remember, Dad's never been licked in his life."

"Hm," said Bob. "It's time he was, then. I'll think it over."

"Here he comes now," she taunted. "Better run along forward and keep out of his way."

Captain Bloom came down the poop-ladder and crossed the deck toward them swiftly. Opposite the main hatch he stopped and scowled at Bob and the girl.

"Can't you find anything better to do than talking to my daughter, Neal?" he growled.

"Perhaps something more useful," Bob returned, "but nothing better."

The skipper's face turned crimson with rage. "Go to your cabin, Rose," he said.

The girl turned and walked aft. Bob caught the shadow of a smile on her red lips as she turned her face away.

"NEAL," the skipper said, "I've stood about enough from you. I don't mind your singing. I can stand the infernal twanging of that jew's-harp of yours. That's your business as long as you do it on your own time. But I'll be damned if you're going to flirt with my daughter on my time."

"Cap," said Bob, jumping off the hatch to the deck, "I think I'm about thirty pounds lighter than you. You're about twenty years older than me. That makes us about even. My name is Neal, not Gordon. And I wasn't flirting. Watch out, I'm coming."

He came. Captain Bloom's fist met him. They were at it.

There is nothing more discouraging to a champion than the knowledge that he has picked a Tatar at last. This moment comes to all champions. It is a bitter moment, bitter as gall.

Captain Bloom, winner of a hundred full-fisted battles, realized that for once he was in for the beating of his life. The fact that it was being administered by a man who was physically his inferior only added to the unpleasantness of the occurrence.

He was being whipped, soundly whipped, before the eyes of his crew. They had gathered around the two men in a circle, and they applauded Neal whenever the mate landed a particularly good blow. The skipper noted that his own blows were not applauded. Indeed they were not deserving of much applause. It was all the skipper could do to keep from being battered to a pulp. Neal had him backed up against the pinrail midships and was going at him hammer and tongs.

In the midst of it Rose interfered. She flung herself between Neal and her father, but Captain Bloom was no coward to hide behind the skirts of a woman. He pushed her aside with a growl of rage and leaped at Bob again.

Bob was waiting for him with a terrific uppercut that ended the battle. Captain Bloom went down and out under the gibing applause of the crew.

Bob looked from the prostrate man to the grinning faces of the crew.

"Get back to your work," he roared, "or I'll lay the whole gang of you out. This is my fight and the skipper's. Save your grinning for some other time. Beat it!"

When he and Rose were doctoring Captain Bloom in the cabin a moment later, the girl looked at Bob reproachfully and said:

"Why didn't you tell me you were a prize-fighter?"

"Because I never tell lies, no matter how good the cause is."

She glanced at him covertly. Here at last was a man who needed none of her sympathy and made no excuses or apologies for his conduct. She felt a sense of satisfaction and comfort in his presence.

When she was bending over the unconscious form of her father, Neal reached out his hand to tuck a wayward lock of her hair into place. Then his hand slipped to her shoulder and rested there. The incongruity of it almost made her laugh. She was submitting to something approaching caresses from the man who had just half-killed her father.

She felt sorry for her father, for the physical suffering he was undergoing. Yet she knew very well that the beating was good for him. It was received in a fair fight. He would not harbor any ill-will toward Neal for the episode. Men that were any good did not mind being licked in a fair fight. Just the same she was thankful that it was he instead of Neal who was beaten. She was not so sure that Neal had the moral courage to take a whipping like that philosophically.

AT DURALONG there was no letter for Bob from the girl back yonder. When Rose reminded him of it on their second day in port, Bob looked at her thoughtfully. She was dressed to go ashore with her father. A very simple dress it was, of some light transparent material through which the tawny skin of her arms glowed. She was very lovely.

"Psychology," she scoffed.

"No. Conceit," he answered.

"You are learning," she laughed softly.

Captain Bloom came out of the cabin just then. Rose left Bob to join her father. At the foot of the gangway the skipper paused and glanced at his mate.

"What are you doing to-night, Neal?" he asked, clearing his throat embarrassedly.

"Nothing," Bob answered with averted gaze.

Captain Bloom frowned and glanced at his shoes. "Rose and I are going up to the consul's office this afternoon. We will be at Rohmer's for supper about seven this evening with a friend of Rose's. Shall I have Rohmer fix up a plate for you?"

Bob glanced at the girl. He tried to catch her eye, but she was looking over his head at a motor-boat crossing the bay under full speed. The unexpected invitation made him hesitate for a moment.

"Who is the fourth? A man?" he parried.

"Yes, a—man. Friend of Rose's."

"I'll be there with the bells on, Cap. Much obliged," said Bob.

He went about his work, whistling as he watched Captain Bloom following his daughter up the gangway. "The old son of a gun," Bob muttered under his breath.

"What I want you to do, Jerry, is to make love to me," Rose said.

She looked across the table at her companion with her most ingratiating smile. Jerry was short, broad-shouldered and pudgy. He was a singularly unattractive young man, except for his eyes. They in turn were in keeping with the rest of his face—doglike, faithful sort of eyes that went very well with the mastiff contour of his features. They held also a gleam of intelligence and humor that made you like Jerry—the instant he addressed you.

"Making love to you is one of my pet occupations, Rosie," he said. He was the only man of her acquaintance who dared call her Rosie. All the others called her Rose, Miss Rose or Miss Bloom.

"*One* of them?" Rose retorted in mock aggrievement. "You too, Brutus?"

"Sure," he grinned. "I've fallen again, hard. Her name is Sue. She's the sister of the Baptist missionary. She's got wonderful eyes and she can stand flatfooted and tell me——"

Rosie stopped her ears with her fingers. "I refuse to listen. Unfaithful brute!"

"All right, Rosie. Fire away. I'm listening. What's his name?"

"His name is Neal," Rose said. "He'll be here in half an hour with Dad. They're running around town together looking for copra. He's our new mate."

Jerry grinned. "I thought you said once, Rosie, that the man you married must be a better man than your father."

"*He* is," she answered with conviction. "He whipped Dad within an inch of his life on the trip over. I had to interfere to keep him from murdering him."

Jerry whistled and reached for his hat. "Excuse me, Rosie. I must be going," he said.

She caught his coat sleeve and forced him back in his chair. "Sit down and listen," she said sternly. "Neal is not that kind of a fellow. He fights square. When he's licked, he takes his medicine like a man."

"Maybe so," Jerry said doubtfully, "but I'm a rotten physician, Rosie, and besides, the man who can lick Captain Bloom don't need any medicine. Then again Sue would hear of it. It'd be all off. I'm not taking any chances."

"You're a poor sport, Jerry—hsh," she added under her breath. "Here come Dad and Neal now."

The next day Neal was standing at the open hatchway bossing the crew unloading merchandise when Rose sauntered up in her middy.

"Who was the dog-faced boy at our table last night?" Bob asked.

"An old friend of mine," Rose answered casually. "Like him?"

"Made his life insurance over in favor of you?" Bob asked.

"Don't be silly, Neal. We're just friends."

"I was going to say if he had made over his life insurance to you, we'll both be ahead when I catch him looking at you like that next time."

"Neal," she said, stamping her foot, "just because you can lick my father——"

Bob held up his hand. "A fellow hates to see his girl copped right under his nose, Rosie."

"My name is Miss Bloom," she said coldly, "and you may exclude me from your list of eligibles."

Bob looked at her thoughtfully. "All right, *Miss Bloom.*" He pulled his cap down over his eyes and turned his back upon her.

Rose hesitated. "Bob," she said softly, "you may call me Rose."

"Thanks, Miss Bloom," he answered stiffly.

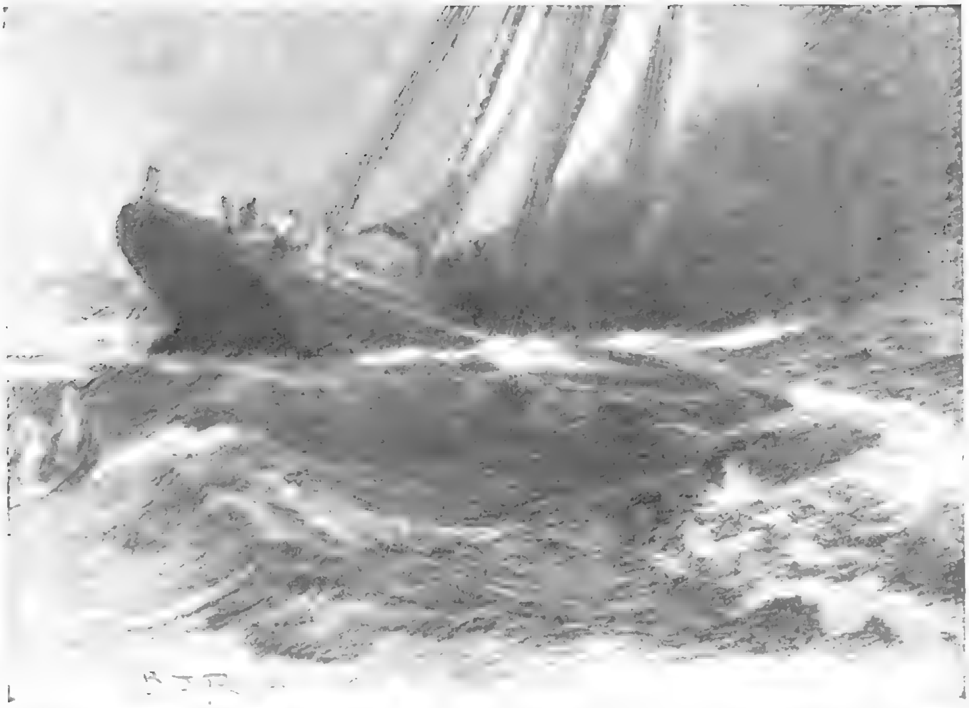
THE next day was Sunday. By way of reconciliation Rose suggested a horseback ride into the hills back of Duralong. Bob agreed. His stand was: Anything once.

They rode out of Duralong on two hired Shetland ponies in the early hours of the tropic dawn. The sun blazed up the long valleys of the foothills. Flocks of bright-colored parrakeets rose from the dewy grass at the horses' feet and winged noisily to cover in the bush.

They followed the shady trail along the edge of the bush, Indian file. Bob's mount, a wiry, long-maned Shetland with a strain of Arab, pressed swiftly on. Rose's horse, a full-blooded Shetland, trotted manfully behind on its short, stubby legs.

Rose was silent. Bob was singing. Softly at first; then as they drew away from the town he raised his voice. The song was "The Old Gray Bonnet." The blazing valley was filled with the rollicking old melody. A startled jack-rabbit paused on his hind legs on the trail ahead, staring at them in amazement.

"Nothing like being happy," Rose said during one of the few pauses in the song.



With her battered old nose buried in the monsoon waters and the two boats towing astern, the *Lily* drove on toward Tangu. The two men and the girl stood by on the poop-deck, waiting.

Bob turned around on his horse and reined it to a stop on the trail. This brought Rose's horse neck and neck with his. Leaning back in his saddle he smiled a slow, friendly smile at her.

"A fellow always feels good when he's got his girl with him on a Sunday morning like this," he explained.

"It must be awfully inconvenient to be so susceptible," she murmured.

"I think you were right about oval cheeks," he went on.

"I hope no past statement of mine caused you to think for a moment——"

"No, ma'am," he interrupted humbly.

"I was going to say if it did, you'd better stop kidding yourself."

"Certainly." His voice was flat, colorless.

For fifteen minutes they rode on in silence. Then he broke into song again.

"It don't take long for you to get over a jolt," she commented with sarcasm.

"That's been part of my education. I figure you'll be coming around in time. They all do."

"I hate you!" she cried. There were tears of rage in her voice.

"For a while you will. But you'll get over it. By and by you'll fall in love with me the same as I am with you. That's part of the education."

"Oh, you detestable man!" she cried. She reached out her riding-whip and struck him a stinging blow across the face.

The moment the blow struck she was sorry. She dropped the whip and covered her face with her hands. Bob straightened up, every muscle of his body taut and his face very white except where the livid streak of the whip lay across his cheek.

Slowly he dismounted and picked up the whip and offered it to her extended in his hand.

"I didn't think you were a coward," he said regretfully. "I had always counted on you being a good sport. It's a great game, Rose, if you don't break the rules."

Rose whipped up her horse and galloped past him, her face flushed and her eyes filled with tears.

Captain Bloom was reading in his canvas

chair under the poop awning when they walked down the gangplank of the *Lily* an hour later. He looked up from his paper and glanced at the two of them curiously.

"Didn't take you long to get sick of horseback riding," he commented.

"It's too hot for such sport," Bob said, wiping the perspiration from his face with his handkerchief.

The skipper stared at Bob. "What happened to your face, Neal?" he asked.

"Horse ran away with me. I got a bit scratched up in the bush."

"Hm," said the skipper, "that pony of yours must have been a bear for speed. You look like you'd been mixed up with a wildcat."

Bob grinned at Rose. The girl tossed her head and went below.

"What happened, Neal?" the skipper asked under his breath.

"I told you what happened. What are you driving at?"

"Hm!" said the skipper thoughtfully. "I didn't know they grew that kind of bushes in Duralong. You've got the pattern of a a crazy-quilt braided into your map."

He turned his back on Bob and buried himself in his paper.

Bob mixed himself a whisky and soda at the table near by.

"Neal," said the skipper presently, "speaking of wildcats, don't try to tame one with your bare hands. Put on a pair of tin mittens and go after them. I had to do it once about twenty years ago. Her mother was like her—only worse."

"She must have been a bear," Bob replied with feeling.

"She was. The best woman that ever trotted a deck under the Union Jack, Neal—after I had fired Sir Galahad, Beau Brummell and a few other misguided blokes into the ash-can. Treat 'em rough, son. The rougher, the better they like it—up to a certain point."

"I'll think it over, Cap."

"You'd better. She's worth it. I hate to see a man with a first-class wallop in him wasting his time playing ping-pong with fate."

"You think I have a chance, then, with Rose?"

"I think—!" The skipper raised his voice. "Quagmired Prophet! You make me sick! I'll just give you till we get back to Sydney. Thirty days. No more. If you haven't pulled the trick by that time, you're fired."

When Bob passed through the messroom on his way to his cabin a few minutes later, Rose was setting the table for dinner.

"I hear you're going to leave us in Sydney, Mr. Neal," she said sweetly.

"You've been listening at the wrong keyhole, girlie," he grinned.

Rose dropped a handful of knives and forks on the oilcloth table-cover and faced him angrily.

"I hate you!" she cried, stamping her foot.

Bob leaned against the door-jamb of his cabin and regarded her admiringly. "Rose," he said, "you look a darling when you're mad."

She raised her hand and shook her finger in his face.

"I—I hope you'll carry that mark till your dying day."

He winced at the words. Then he crossed the cabin floor and caught her in his arms and held her fast.

"I am going to put my mark on you—now," he said quietly. She tried to free herself, but her arms were pinioned to her side. Her lips sought to avoid his in a fury of epithets. But Bob had his way. Then he released her and went into his cabin.

THE *Lily* was driving south with two hundred tons of soft coal from the coaling-station at Duralong. She was scheduled to meet the monitor *Salamander* in the bay of Tangu, a week's sailing from Duralong.

Bob was standing on the break of the poop with his hands in his pockets watching the play of the topsails when Captain Bloom touched him on the shoulder. The skipper jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"Go below and see if you can smell anything."

"What's up?"

"Nothing, I think. I guess I'm mistaken. But I'd like to hear your verdict."

"All right."

Captain Bloom lit his pipe and paced the deck impatiently, waiting for his mate's return. "Well?" he inquired when Bob came out of the cabin. Bob avoided the skipper's earnest gaze. "I'll ease up the battens of the forehatch and take a look," he said.

"Then you think—?" The dreaded question died unasked on the skipper's lips.

"Smells suspicious," Bob commented. "I'll verify it in a minute."

"Don't take off more than one section of the hatch," the skipper cautioned. "If there's anything wrong, the air's got to be kept away from it."

Bob nodded, and disappeared forward. Five minutes later he returned. "The coal is burning like a furnace ten feet abaft the foremast," he announced.

Captain Bloom scratched his head thoughtfully. "Did you batten her down again, good and tight?" he asked.

"Yes."

"How far are we from Tangu, Neal?"

"Two hundred and ten miles at noon. We've run twenty miles since."

"What is she logging now?"

"Seven knots and a fraction."

Captain Bloom knitted his brows. "A hundred and ninety miles to go. Even if this wind keeps up we can't make Tangu in less than twenty-four hours. Did the fire seem to have gone deep?"

"I couldn't tell. The fumes and the heat were pretty bad."

"Hm. Looks like we're in for it, Neal. What do you think?"

"Looks pretty bad."

"There's nothing much we can do except keep her on her course. Better bend on the old flying jib and the main topgallant staysail. We've got to make every rag draw."

"All right."

Bob turned to go. "One more thing," the skipper said. "Keep it from the men as long as possible."

"All right."

When Bob came into the cabin for supper at four bells, Rose and Captain Bloom had already begun eating.

"The wind is freshening a bit," Bob said, avoiding the girl's face. "She's making eight and a half with the extra canvas."

The skipper nodded. "P'raps I'll win that bet yet, Neal," he said.

Rose glanced at her father interrogatively.

"I'd like to know what you two men have been putting your heads together about all afternoon," she said.

The skipper winked at Bob. "Our secret, Neal. Isn't it?"

Bob nodded. "Some secret, Cap."

Rose tossed her head and returned to her plate.

One of the sailors came into the cabin a moment later. He paused in the open doorway and looked from one to the other.

"Something wrong below, Cap'n. Fo-c's'le's full of smoke—" he paused at the warning gesture of the skipper.

Rose pushed back her chair and sprang to her feet. "Smoke!" she exclaimed. "I've smelt it for an hour. We're on fire. Why didn't you tell me?"

The skipper turned to the sailor.

"Hear that, Charley? She says we're on fire. A good joke! As if we'd be sitting here calmly eating our supper with the old tub sizzling under our feet. Run along, Charley. I'll come forward in a minute and see what's wrong."

When the man had gone, Captain Bloom arose leisurely, lit his pipe and strolled on deck. Bob ate his supper in silence.

Rose turned upon him fiercely. "Tell me the truth. I've got a right to know. Are we on fire?"

"Yes."

"How far has it gone?"

"Too far to do anything but run for it and hope that she doesn't blow up before we make port."

"Isn't there some way to put it out?"

He shook his head. "We haven't got force enough in the deck-pump to put out a fire of that size. Besides we don't dare unbatten the hatches. There is only one thing to do. Keep the air away from the fire and hope for the best—and not be afraid," he added.

"I'm not afraid," she answered steadily.

"I knew you wouldn't be. That's why I told you."

She shot him a swift glance. "You're forgiven for your conduct a week ago," she said slowly. "One good turn deserves another."

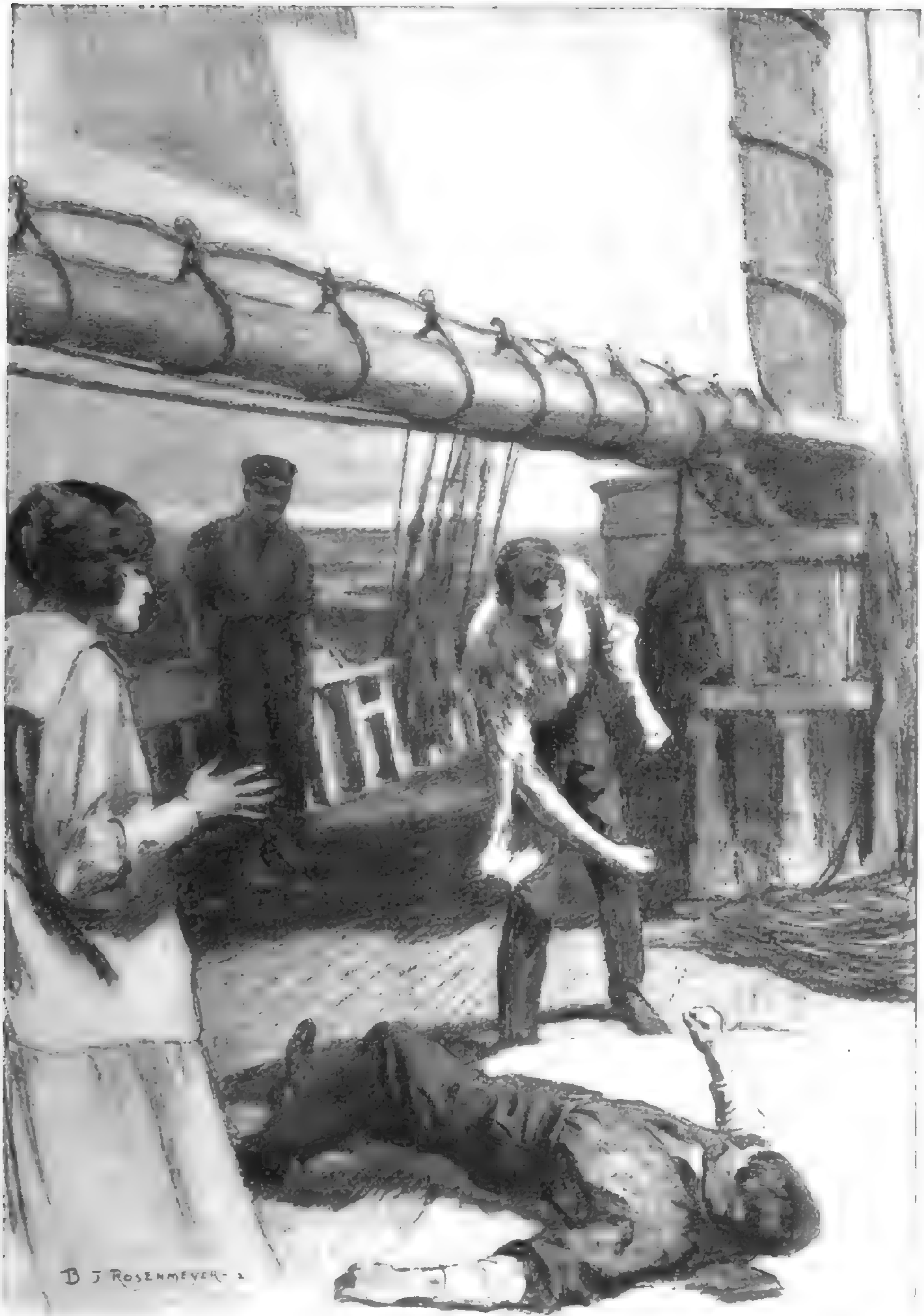
"Meaning that I may do it again?" he inquired blithely.

"Please don't be a cad. We've serious work to think about."

"I am serious."

She shrugged her shoulders and left the table.

At eight bells Captain Bloom ordered the crew to bring their belongings into the mess-room. The heat had made the forecastle



Captain Bloom pushed Rose aside and leaped at Bob again. Bob was waiting for him with an uppercut that ended the battle. Captain Bloom went down and out under the gibing applause of the crew.

untenable. The skipper told the watch below to spread their bedding on the floor of the messroom. Captain Bloom and Bob both stayed on deck. Just before midnight Rose came up.

"It's getting too hot in my cabin," she said as she joined the two men in the windward shrouds.

Captain Bloom nodded to her in the dark.

"Better strike eight bells, Neal," he said. "It's fifteen minutes early, but strike it anyhow. Keep all hands on deck for the rest of the night. Unship both life-boats. Swing the stern boat into the davits and let her hang. We may have to run for it."

"All right."

Bob ordered the deck watch to follow him, and had them unlash the forward life-boat, which was lashed bottom up on the roof of the deck-house. He had them rig a couple of falls in the main and fore rigging and swing the boat off the deck-house to the lee bulwarks. When the other watch came on deck, he put them to work to clear the davits and swing the stern boat into the falls over the side.

"Bos'n, take a couple of men and go down the lazaret for provisions," Bob said. "I'll bring up a compass for each boat. Charley, look to the water-kegs. Report to me, Bos'n, when everything is ready."

"All right, sir."

Captain Bloom and Rose were pacing the poop-deck when Bob joined them, half an hour later.

"Everything is ready, Cap'n," Bob said.

"Good. We may have to abandon her at daylight," the skipper answered.

Bob nodded. "The deck is getting so hot that you can't stand in one place more than a minute. It's a good thing the wind holds steady. We won't be able to man the braces soon."

"She's making nine knots now. I want to stay by as long as possible. Every mile gives us just that much more chance of making Tangu in the boats. It is going to be a stiff pull in a sea like this."

Rose came aft and joined Bob when he was bending over the log-line with the electric torch. "Dad wants to see you."

"All right, Rose."

He flashed the torch in her face. The girl met his gaze steadily.

"Anything wrong, Rose?"

She laughed softly. "Dad's developed an ear for music," she said. "He wants you to play something."

Bob glanced at her sharply and followed her.

The skipper was standing near the break of the poop when Bob came up. The crew were gathered about the cabin skylight, muttering among themselves.

"Neal," the skipper whispered, jerking his thumb toward the assembled men, "they're getting restless. I don't like mandolin music, but——"

"All right, Cap," Bob grinned, "I'll run down and get it."

"You might sing 'em that 'Serenade' thing. It ought to soothe 'em. I always go to sleep over it myself."

IN THE early hours before the dawn a voice was raised in song as the doomed ship plunged on. Seven men and a girl listened. Bob sang as he had never sung before. He laughed at their fears, joked with them, shamed them into taking a grip upon themselves, cajoled them, told them what he thought of them—bitterly, pointedly—through his songs, raising his head from time to time for the faint glow of dawn in the east that would release him.

Rose sat on the deck to windward watching him, with her knees drawn up and her face in her hands. Captain Bloom stood in the weather shrouds near her, immovable as a statue, with his right arm hooked about the backstays.

Presently a faint glow in the east announced the coming of the dawn. The skipper crossed to Neal's side and laid his hand on his shoulder affectionately and faced the circle of men in the faint light.

"The concert is over, boys," he said briefly. "Man the boats."

Captain Bloom took the wheel himself and ran the schooner up in the wind, to give them a chance to launch the boats. With her sails aback the *Lily* lay rolling and pitching head on in the choppy seas. In fifteen minutes both boats were towing in the wake of the schooner by their painters.

"Bos'n, get your crew into the big boat. My daughter will go in your boat with you. Mr. Neal and I will stay aboard until we are forced to leave the ship. We'll tow both boats as long as possible. She may hold together for several hours. If so, we'll be that much nearer Tangu. Should she show signs of blowing up, we'll signal you. You'll immediately cut your painter and go adrift. Mr. Neal and I will follow in the small boat."

The crew pulled the boat under the stern and slid down the painter one by one.

"All right, Rose, you next. Step lively," the skipper said.

"I am going to stay with you and—Mr. Neal."

"Get into that boat, Rose. We've no time for sentimental parleying."

"Dad," she said, quietly "I'm going to stay. My mind is made up. Please don't make a scene before Neal."

The skipper glanced over his shoulder at Bob. The mate had put the wheel hard to port. The schooner was paying off now. The sails were beginning to fill. Bob caught the girl's eye.

"Better hurry, Rose," he called out.

"She wants to stay, Neal," Captain Bloom answered, throwing up his hands with a gesture of disgust.

The boat with the crew dropped astern. The *Lily* swung off before the wind, towing the two boats side by side.

"Well?" Bob asked when Rose came over and stood by the compass a moment later.

The girl turned her face away. "I want to prove to you that I'm no coward," she said under her breath. "I want you to know that a woman can be as brave as a man."

Bob laughed softly. "Oh, you wonderful girl!" he whispered. His hand closed about hers in a grip of steel.

"I want you to know, Bob, that if—anything happens—I—am sorry for what I did—that day."

He nodded. "I know."

WITH her battered old nose buried in the monsoon waters and the two boats towing astern, the *Lily* drove on toward Tangu. The two men and the girl stood by on the poop-deck, waiting.

The heat below was sending the pitch bubbling through the deck-seams. The hatches belched smoke at every plunge of the schooner. From the pump-wells midships a double column of black, swirling smoke crept forward along the deck to the forecastle head.

At six bells — seven o'clock — Captain Bloom looked at the log-line and took the wheel from Bob's hands and told the mate to take a rest on the skylight seat.

"She's making eight and a half, Neal," he said; "sixty miles more to go. If she'll hold together till noon, another five hours, we'll be within sight of land."

The three spoke to each other but little after that. Each one was occupied with his own thoughts. As Bob watched the girl beside him, he saw dawning in Rose's eyes a look that dawns but once in a woman's eyes, a look that only one man may see. Through the long hours waiting for that livid noon they sat and looked at each other in silence.

She was startled from her reverie by the skipper's striking eight bells—noon. Out of the tropic haze ahead she saw a low coastline dipping out of the horizon.

Neal sprang to the skipper's side and grasped the wheel with both hands, pointing ahead. The two men put the wheel hard to starboard. Both boats swung off in a wide circle at the end of their towlines as the schooner ran into the wind, sails aback.

"Let 'er go," the skipper shouted to the bos'n, who was standing ready with his sheath-knife in the bow of the life-boat. The bos'n gave one slash with the knife across the painter. The boat with the crew shot past them to leeward.

For a moment the old schooner stood pounding in the wind, trembling from stem to stern. A series of muffled explosions shook the deck under their feet. Then with the noise of a cannon's shot the foward deck blew up. A solid wall of flame seventy-five feet high burst into the fore rigging, carrying the sails with it in one mighty rush of flame.

"Quick! Into the boat, both of you," the skipper shouted. "Cut the painter. I'll hold her as long as I can. Stand by close. I'll swim for it."

Bob grasped the girl about the waist and lifted her over the railing. She slid down the painter. He followed. Cutting the rope with his knife, Bob pushed off from the burning ship and waited for the skipper to leap. A moment later they drew the dripping form of Captain Bloom over the gunwale of the boat.

For half an hour the two boats lay side by side watching the burning ship. The flames, driven by the terrific draft from below, leaped the tarred rigging like a band of wolves. In an instant every stitch of the dry sails was devoured. The fragments rose into the air like countless flaming montgolfiers and fell about them on the agitated water in a shower of sparks.

Explosion followed explosion. The poop-deck blew up. Cabins and messroom rose in the air and for an instant hung poised upon the rush of flames from below, a honeycombed labyrinth of flaming passageways and twisted timbers. Then the whole mass settled back with a grinding roar and leaped into flame.

The old ship was devoured with incredible swiftness. The flames engulfed her from stem to stern. They leaped over the bulwarks in the strong monsoon breeze, streaming to leeward like the tongues of a thousand panting wolves. They danced corkscrew fashion in mad, furious swirls about her oil-soaked spars.

In less than thirty minutes the *Lily* sank in a hissing vortex of blackened water, her charred spars enveloped in a rush of steam.

Shortly before dusk the skiff with its leg-of-mutton sail shot through the gap of Tangu lagoon followed closely by the bos'n's six-oared life-boat.

Rose lifted her head. At anchor on the placid waters of the lagoon rode the monitor *Salamander*, her white bridges and turrets outlined sharply against the dark purple of the sunset sky. Her long low hull rode the water like a painted thing in the curve of the dark-green foliaged crescent of the lagoon.

Rose turned her head and looked at Bob. Their eyes met. He reached out his hand and drew her into the stern seat beside him. Her hand closed over his grasping the tiller. Neither of them spoke. The skiff slipped across that placid coralline sea on the merest whisper of a breeze.

There came suddenly to Rose the desire to have her love like this—peaceful; a haven to retire into after the battles with the world. At first it disturbed her vaguely. She felt that she was no longer her old self. She had surrendered. She wondered if the new self would be as attractive to Bob as the old one. It threw her into a momentary panic of thought, but when she looked into the eyes of her lover a moment later she laughed at her own fears.

He was smiling. His blue eyes were limpid, clear, as they were that Sunday morning before she struck him with the whip.

In EVERYBODY'S for August

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Brooders

A Husband's Plaintive Tale of a Bride's Whims as told by the Author of "Plague o' My Hearth"

By Walter De Leon

REMEMBER me telling how, over a year ago, I got married and went to live with my wife on the secluded chunk of unadulterated wilderness she had bought for a farm over in Jersey; and how all winter, in place of playing piano in vaudeville like I'd did for twenty years, whenever I could land a job, I spent my time clearing off heavy underbrush, chopping down massive trees and buying liniment; and how, when only the sustaining vigor of Freda's earthly affection and heavenly cooking had dragged me through the spring plowing season, she made I and Cecil, our hired man, plant red tomatoes all over the place instead of potatoes like the regular farmers around us was doing?

Freda, my wife, is Swedish by nature and breeding, and in her day was a tight-wire walker of charm and distinction. At the age of thirty-five she retired with a busted ankle, twenty pounds of excess baggage between her knees and shoulders and a bank account of large but unmeasured size. Two years later when I and her met in the same boarding-house and got married, I didn't have nothing but forty-six years of a fairly misspent life, the gray remains of a once thick head of hair and the feeling that I and Freda had been made for each other, even though we'd never worked on the same bill and didn't know each other's routine or mannerisms.

A couple of times during the first year of our double life, after a tree had fell on me or something, I got a yearn to go back on the road again. But Freda was set against it. At that you couldn't blame her. All her life she'd worked hard and saved harder so as some day she could retire, pick out a husband and have enough money left to buy a home and live like other women, if possible. And she proved she was on the level the day she came and showed me a check which was the profits of our tomato crop. It was more money than I ever fingered in one lump in my life.

"You guessed right," I told her. "Potatoes this summer has been as cheap and plentiful as these here home-brew bottle caps. What are you going to do with all this jack?"

"I tell you something, Billy," Freda replied in the piquant accents of her native heath, "I give you this money. You worked hard and earned it. Besides, I don't want profits. I got a home, I got a good husband—who is going to get better—I got everything to make me feel happy—except children, maybe. For that I am too old." There ain't nothing I can say except throw my arm around her broad athletic shoulders. "But, Billy," she goes on, "the only thing can spoil it is you going on the road."

"Freda," I say, putting the check in my pocket, "the way I feel now, I wouldn't go as far as Hoboken to play piano for Galli-Curci. I don't know her repertoire, anyway."

But along in September comes the old itch for a keyboard and the smell of a show-shop. I can't help it. Besides, I've got money and nothing to do with it. So I dope out a scheme to cover everything. I begin taking trips in the old 1911 Ford, which Freda had bought second-handed, looking around in the different villages near us for a cheap-rent store or barn or something I could turn into a movie house. I didn't say nothing to Freda about my scheme. I was growing more and more into her unprofessional habit of doing things first and talking about them later. Also, it wasn't as easy finding a location as I'd thought it would be.

One night about the first of October I and Freda and Cecil, the sturdy octogenarian who Freda had reclaimed from the almshouse and who knew all about farming for fifty cents a day and board, we was all sitting around recovering from a meal you wouldn't believe was the product of just two loving hands, when friend wife says, "Billy, what are you going to do this winter?"

"I been figuring on taking some X-ray pictures of the Ford to find out what's holding it together," I tell her.

Freda pulls a couple of stitches in something she's sewing. "I tell you something, Billy. Why don't you raise Philadelphia capons?"

"I'm satisfied living here in New Jersey," I say, trying to remember what capons was. "Besides, after working like I've did the last year, why should I raise anything but my knife and fork for a few months?"

"There's lots of money raising capons," says my placid mate.

"Then why ain't the farmers around here raising none?"

"Why didn't some of them plant tomatoes last spring instead of all raising potatoes and driving down the price?"

I give her that game. "What are you sewing on?" I ask.

"I make some baby clothes for Mrs. Svendson, down in Brunswick Gardens," Freda tells me.

Young Olaf Svendson was a florist who was having a terrible time getting his flower-beds on to a paying basis. And he needed money twice as much as an ordinary married man. You see, he was a twin who had married a twin. So what could be more natural that the set of twins they'd had four years before, and the second set of twins which had made their début two years later? They were Swedes, too, and Freda had been lending little Mrs. Svendson a helping hand while making me give Olaf advice and fertilizer.

Freda was batty over their kiddies. There's something about all acrobats and children— I don't know. Every once in a while you read where some actress or big producer says a woman can't never emotionally qualify to be a star till she's been married or had a child. But I notice it's always the acrobats and bike riders that has the big families. Looking at friend wife bent over, taking those careful little stitches, I decide the most cheering thing I can do for her is to start a rousing argument over the capon business.

"Listen," I say, "have you got the slightest idea how to start raising these here capons?"

"Sure," she says. "Eggs and an incubator."

That give me something to work on. "Incubator!" I shout. "There are more than twenty different brands of incubators. Why? I'll tell you," I go on, quoting what Cecil one day told me, "because none of them is perfect. Most of 'em ain't even successful. The hardest thing in the farming world is to get a strong healthy chick out of an egg."

"You got nothing to do with that," Freda says. "The chicks get theirselves out of the eggs."

"Even so," I say, "you got to give them the proper inducements. Why, I'd have to get books and study and——"

"I tell you something, Billy; I already got a book for you." Freda lays down her sewing and hands me a book called "A Chick From Every Egg," guaranteed by the Moulting Incubator Co.

"You ain't fell for no advertising dodge like this, have you?" I ask, feeling that maybe I had picked out the wrong thing to argue about.

"No, Billy. I send to Washington, D. C., and the Government, they send me this book." She gives me a U. S. Agriculture Farmers' Bulletin.

Cecil, who had been kidding himself by sharpening a toothpick, pulls his whiskers out of his mouth and squeaks, "Will you tell me why us farmers has to pay taxes to support a lot of college professors to tell us farmers things we know better than the college professors, instead of making college professors pay taxes to support farmers to tell the college professors what's what?"

"I agree with your last word," I says, finding in the book something that looks like I could successfully crab about. "Listen, Freda, it's all off before we start. The smallest incubator made is sixty-egg power. We only got ten hens, and half of them is I. W. W's. It would be asking too much of our five willing workers to lay a dozen extra eggs apiece and a couple of spares in case of a blow-out, besides what we eat, in time to place any confidence in the first ones laid."

Cecil speaks right out of his turn. "A sixty-egg incubator ain't no good. It's as much trouble as a big one, and when you get your hatch, what have you got? Nothing!"

"Cecil, he's right," calmly remarks Freda. "That's why I ordered a two-hundred-and-twenty-egg incubator."

"*Ordered* it!" I yell.

"Yes. A three-hundred-and-sixty-egg incubator is too big when setting eggs cost seventy-five cents a dozen."

"Where can you buy eggs for seventy-five cents?" squeals Cecil. "They're eighty cents this year.

"Vanden's, in Engletown, he sold to me for seventy-five cents," Freda announces.

There's silence in the room while I Sherlock Holmes for something to head off eighteen dozen eggs.

"Listen," I finally say. "It says here young chicks should be fed plenty of milk. Especially capons. We got no cow, no ambition to have one, and Redfern across the road is sparing us all the milk he possibly can, now. What's the use of hatching two hundred and twenty thirsty birds and then not have no milk to feed them?"

"Goats' milk is fine for chicks and babies," Freda informs us.

"There ain't nothing fine about a goat, from his appearance to his instincts," I answer.

"Jim Applestote has a couple of good goats," Cecil cracks, diplomatically removing the goats from our farm.

Freda bites off a thread. "I know. I bought one from him yesterday."

"Listen, Swedeheart," I says, heavy sarcasm drooling off of every syllable. "You ain't told me yet what day you picked out for me to begin the capon business."

"Saturday," friend wife answers. "That's the day everything will come. I'm going to spend the day with Thelma Svendson."

"Don't you think it would be only polite to stay home and receive the goat—sort of welcome him into the family?"

"Her," Freda corrects me. "Anyway, goats ain't sensitive."

After I finished bouncing around the ceiling, I began to reconstruct my plans a little. The Guide to Chickhood said that if properly encouraged an intelligent egg could hatch in twenty-one days.

"That's when your trouble starts," Cecil told me. "Taking care of them little chicks."

I saw I had three weeks ahead of me to get a lease on a store, get the carpenters busy refitting it for a theatre, install a projection machine and arrange for my films. I had two days before starting with the incubator. I figured if it all could be done while the eggs were loafing along in the hot-box, then, about the time the hard work came, I'd have a good excuse to be away from the farm most of the time.

"Cecil," I says Friday morning, before starting over to Engletown to look at a place I'd heard of, "you been working hard and faithful for I and Freda ever since you joined the troupe. Especially at mealtimes you've showed an industry that deserves a reward. Commencing Saturday afternoon I'm going to give you three weeks' vacation on full pay. You'll get your fifty cents a day and board for doing nothing. Aside from building the fire mornings, feeding the parasites in the hen-coop, splitting a little wood and curdling the milk on your way back from Redfern's twice a day, you won't have a thing to do from sun-down to sun-up. I'll do all the work on the incubator, the eggs and the goat. After three weeks of leisure, helping me with the brooder and the chicks will be absolutely a relief to you, won't it?"

Cecil laid down the ax he was honing. "Now that's real kind of you, boss. It'll give me time to oil and fix up my grindstone wheel."

A fellow named Wills owned the place I went to look at. When he opened the door of it, I noticed a funny smell. It was strong like magnolia, but nothing like that in flavor. "Who moved out of here and left this?" I said, sniffing.

"Fellow that rented the place went broke and gave it up last month," Wills told me.

"Went broke!" I saw a lot of benches around. "He didn't have a movie house here, did he?"

"No. Believe he said he was trying to raise capons."

"He shouldn't have kept his goat so near his eggs," I said. "Listen; after using

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plenty of myrrh and incense here, this place will be all right for what I want, if we can agree on the rent. Fix the lease so I can put wall-paper on the walls, build a screen at that end and a tin projection room at the other. Now how much rent do you want?"

He told me. That gave us something to talk about for a couple of hours. Finally he saw the light. "Draw up a lease and I'll be in Monday to sign it," I told him.

Then I rattled the old Ford down to Svendson's to pick up Freda before she'd get wondering why I was so late and ask me where I'd spent the afternoon. But I didn't need to worry. She had got wagging her native tongue so busy she'd forgot all about me.

By working late Friday night I and Cecil finished the weather-proof room we'd built adjoining the back porch. Early Saturday morning the eggs and the rest of the improvements dropped in on us.

First we tied the goat to a post in the chicken-fence. In four minutes she had chewed the rope in two and was concentrating on the post. "Put her in with the chickens till we can build a corral for her," suggested Cecil. She ruined a beautiful set of rooster tail-feathers in one mouthful. When Cecil went in to grab the end of the rope dangling from her neck, she took a good look at his whiskers and hungrily followed her greedy eyes. Cecil's yell brought Freda on the scene.

The minute the goat saw her, she trotted over and let Freda pat her. "You leave her to me," says the wife. "I think she's going to like me."

"If she remains here that long," I says. Then we start assembling the incubator.

I grab a hold of one hundred and forty pounds of home-without-a-mother and turn around to see what Cecil is reneging on. He's got a little saucer in his hand.

"Looks too small to me," he shakes his head.

"What's too small for what?" I say, one corner of the box slipping down on my right foot.

"This water-pan is too small for that big incubator. Eggs need moisture, but too much or too little makes a poor hatch."

"There'll be no hatch at all if you don't give me a hand with this box," I tell him. "Your vacation don't start till noon."

"Got to be awful careful of your lamp," he says a few minutes later, grinding a pair of scissors for me to trim the lamp-wick with. "You got to keep your chimley clean or it'll smoke."

I'd been wondering what he meant by "poor hatch," but I couldn't let him get away with that last remark. "If you're going to pull that old smoked chicken gag on me, don't do it," I warn him.

" 'Tain't no gag, boss. A smoky lamp makes a poor hatch." He picks up a thermometer and shakes it like a bottle of cough sirup.

"Hope this is a good one," he says. "So few of 'em are."

"What's the difference?" I ask.

"Holy Pete, boss! The heat inside the incubator must be kept at one hundred and two degrees *all the time*. If it gets too hot or too cold inside, it makes a poor hatch."

"Besides being uncomfortable for the eggs," I says, running a splinter under my thumb-nail. "Tell me; how hot do I have to keep the goat?"

The hammer slips out of Cecil's hand and smashes five eggs in the top till of the crate. Cecil looks at them, surprised.

"Them ain't Plymouth Rocks," he squeaks.

"And they ain't cobblestones or bricks, either. They're six-cent eggs with tender shells," I bawl.

"Them's Orpingtons!" Cecil is hopping with excitement. "They make the very finest capons—if you can hatch 'em. We'll know in eight or ten days when we test 'em."

"Test them?"

"Yes. Then's when we throw out them that ain't no good."

"What do you mean—no good?"

"No good. Eggs that won't hatch."

I remembered the bill that had come along with the eggs. Also I remembered how I hadn't let no one but me pay it. "Do you mean that some of these eggs is going to be duds?" I yell.

"Of course. There's always a large per cent. of eggs don't hatch. That's where the losses come in the chicken business. Not only that, but after what's left *do* hatch, you always lose a good per cent. of the little chicks."

"What's *good* about it?" I ask.

"Good it ain't bigger. I've knew of

men getting only two chicks out of twelve eggs. That's what you call a poor hatch." Cecil scratches his beard mournfully.

"Nobody every called you 'Bluebird' for a joke, did they?" I ask.

After the machine is all set up, the eggs in the trays and the lamp smoking merrily, Cecil remarks: "You know you mustn't leave the machine for more than three hours the first couple of days. You got to regulate your lamp and see that the 'bator warms up gradually till the thermometer reads one hundred and two degrees. Quick heating makes a poor——" He ducked six cents' worth of cackle-berry just in time.

But by that time the full meaning of his remark had percolated. "You mean I've got to get out of bed every three hours all night long to look at the thermometer?"

"Yes, and to regulate your lamp and see it ain't smoking like it's doing now. One good thing, though. You don't have to begin turning your eggs till Monday."

"Turn 'em?" I ask, as Freda announces dinner. Which means that Cecil's vacation has begun.

"There's differences of opinion," Cecil tells us at the table, sharpening his knife on his fork. "Some men turn their eggs twice a day, some three times, and some——"

"Wait a minute," I cut in. "What do they turn 'em *for?*"

"So one side of the eggs won't get hotter than the other. Uneven heated eggs makes a poor— Anyhow," he went on before I could find anything heavy enough to throw, "you really ought to do as the hen does. She keeps turning and rolling and shifting 'em all the time."

"What a wise crack that is," I say. "In the first place I haven't got none of the hen's maternal instincts, and second, I'm a piano player and not a juggler. Then how can I do as the hen does?"

"Turn your eggs at least four times a day. Course that means getting up in the night, but you'll get so's you can do it real fast. Too bad my vacation starts to-day. Otherwise, I'd— Look, boss! The goat! She's eating off that new tire you bought last week!"

All afternoon I debated with myself. Should I quit cold and lose the price of the eggs, or should I humor Freda and—after wiping the heavy soot out of the chimney and looking at the thermometer at nine o'clock that night, I went in and wound and set the alarm clock.

"Listen, darling," I tell Freda, "if you wake up in the night and find me gone, don't worry. I'll be out in the incubatory trimming the lamp under two hundred and twenty eggs."

"Billy!" she cries, throwing her arms around me in her glad, gymnastic way. I don't get the idea. I can't see no reason for her strange joy unless maybe she's heard that Orpingtons make the best capons—if you can side-step a poor hatch.

Sunday morning after breakfast, Freda started out with a basket of jelly and jam and some home-made candy she hadn't told me nothing about to walk to the Svendsons, a mile away. After she'd left, Cecil stuffed a lot of my good tobacco into the pipe I give him for Christmas, and said, "Boss, hadn't you better milk the goat?"

"For what?" I ask. "It's three weeks before the chicks will begin crying for their bottle."

"Sure. But unless you milk the goat at least once a day——"

"I'll get a poor hatch, I suppose," I finish for him. "Listen, if the phone rings and any real-estate agent or anybody asks for me, it wouldn't absolutely spoil your vacation, would it, to call me? I'll be out milking the goat."

Right away I found the goat had different ideas. Furthermore, she began showing me in her eloquent, dumb fashion just how different they was. Harsh words soon gave place to hasty actions. There's only twenty acres on our place; but inside of half an hour our feet had touched every yard of it.

The goat and I took turns. First I chased her and then she chased me. After a while I thought of a new game. I hid behind a large bush and began to bleat plaintively. The goat stuck her nose around the corner of the bush. I did a beautiful leaping dive toward her. But she ducked, leaving nothing but the rough earth for me to sprawl over. Then she helped me to my feet. I didn't mind that so much as her trying to trip me as I bounded around agilely looking for another bush.

I was resting on the lowest branch of the old apple-tree, the goat earnestly nibbling on the long shred which was all that

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remained of one leg of my overalls, when I remembered it was time to wipe the soot out of the lamp-chimney again. I couldn't convince the goat that the game was over, so I began hollering for Cecil. No answer.

Standing up on the branch of the tree, I cupped my hands around my mouth. "Hey! Cecil!" With that, I slipped off the branch. The goat didn't think I could do it, I guess. She was so surprised that she didn't get out of my way. *Blump!* I land on top of her. Our arms and legs enfolding each other, we roll around, tangling ourselves in the strands of the wild raspberry vines bestrewing the ground. Finally we struggle to our feet—that is, the goat did, her nose pointed straight into the fresh morning breeze wafting from the north. I find myself astride her—facing south. She gives an emphatic buck. I sit hastily on her neck. As we go down again, I manage to wrap my legs around her head and grab her two hind legs in a death-grip. Oh, man, that goat was strong!

At that minute Cecil wheezes up. Critically he watches the goat's struggles to get out from under and mine to get enough breath to tell him where my shotgun is.

"Excuse me, boss," he says, "but that ain't the right way to milk a goat!"

I pull my heel out of her mouth and turn her nose toward my hired man. "Sic 'im, goat; sic 'im!" I beg, rolling off her.

I'll say this for Cecil. He may be old, but he sure is spry. I'll bet that goat didn't assist him much over half the distance to the house.

That night at supper Freda asks, "What name shall we call the goat?"

"There ain't any names left to call her," I say, carefully shifting the pillow I'm sitting on. "I used 'em all up this morning. At that, we might call her the Vamp. She's about wrecked my home life."

"I tell you something," Freda says. "I think we call her Olga, eh?"

Cecil loads his knife up with mashed potato, and waving it warningly, he says: "Call her anything you want. But if you're thinking of having me take care of her, I want you should know I'm going back to the almshouse as soon as my vacation is over."

"I'll take care of Olga," says Freda, pouring oil on the mixed salad. "Billy, I think you going to like Olga's butter.'

"There ain't nothing about Olga's head I'll *ever* like," I tell her.

"You never eat goat's milk butter the way I fix it—with spice, Billy. Put on bread, little kiddies rather have it than cake, and better for them, too. I got two quarts already started. We got a good goat, Billy. This morning, before breakfast, when I milk her, she don't make one move."

"You should have saw her after breakfast," is all I can say.

Monday afternoon on account of having to juggle two hundred and twenty Orpingtons at three o'clock I was a little late seeing Wills about the lease for my movie house. "Well," I says, "have you got it drew up?"

"No," he says. "I rented the place to somebody else."

"Maybe you've got a comedy explanation why," I says. "I'd like to hear it."

"Fellow come in yestiddy and give me two months rent to hold the place for him for a month. So I give him an option. Said he'd tell me at the end of the month what he wanted the place for and if I didn't like it, I didn't have to rent to him."

"Who was he?"

"He made me promise not to mention no names."

"Did you give this here boot-legger a renewal clause in that option?"

"I believe I did."

"I like the way you do business," I tell him. "Like the Allies; take it or leave it."

Losing that place put a crimp in my plans like water in the gas-tank of a runaway couple's automobile. I didn't have time to scout around for another location. It set me back a good month. The more I thought about it the sorer I got. Especially when in spite of me wrecking my night's rest to caress them, I had to throw out ten eggs at the second testing because the divine sparkle, or whatever it is in an egg which kindles into chicks, was missing entirely.

The phone was nearly as bad as the eggs. We was on a five-party line. Our ring was one bell. And that's the only ring I never did hear. No more would I lay down in the afternoon to grab off a little sleep than the fours and fives began jingling. I didn't dare stuff the bell because Wills had promised to hunt for another location and phone me if he found one. I didn't wish Freda to get an earful of something like that while I slept unconscious.

Comes the night before the day the chicks are billed to start coming up for air. Supper was over. Freda was out in the kitchen carelessly singing the overture to "Poet and Peasant" with variations. Cecil was out in the barn sharpening a monkey-wrench or something. I was sitting on an egg-beater trying to keep awake for my nine o'clock inspection. I'd been brooding over a hunch for days. Why should somebody suddenly pay two months rent on a place which nobody but me and another capon culturist had ever wanted? Also, why had the party wished his name kept secret? Maybe I was wrong, but—closing the door to the kitchen I rang up Wills.

"Listen," I say, "have you heard anything more from Olaf Svendson about that option?"

"No," Wills answered, "he ain't been in yet."

I hung up. I knew now who had crabbed my plans. Svendson didn't have enough money to pay even his back rent. It was Freda!

In two jumps I've got the door open. "Freda!" I bellow. "I just had Wills on the wire. What——"

"Billy, *stop!*" There's something in her voice and expression as she wipes her hands on her apron and comes toward me that makes me listen.

"Billy, when you hear it, I think you going to be more mad at me than you are now. I wasn't going to tell you till it happened. Now I see I got to."

"Quit stalling," I tell her. "What is it? What's your alibi for double-crossing me like you done!"

"Billy, after we get married and have the farm and the Ford and the fine tomatoes, I have everything I dreamed about for twenty years—except kiddies. I didn't fall off the wire and break my ankle soon enough for that. So I begin looking around for a baby for you and me. I go to orphan homes. But I don't see anything I like. They ain't young enough.

"Then I meet Thelma Svendson. Twice already she's had twins. One day she tells me something. She ain't so happy about it because Olaf has such hard luck making money. We are talking in Svensky, of course, and I say, 'Thelma, not only that, but you ain't really strong enough to take care of another couple of twins besides your four kiddies already. So I tell you. When the time comes, you give me one of the babies for me and Billy to keep.' "

Freda looks into my bulging eyes and open mouth. "It sounds much better in Swedish," she says. "Well, Thelma says no. But every day I keep talking to her. I make little baby clothes to show her I know how. I read books about baby food, and then I buy Olga. I play and take care of her four little already twins till I prove to her that children like me like I like children. So finally one day, when the frost kills Olaf's violet bed, she says, 'Freda, you can have one—if it's twins.'

"Billy, I am so happy I got to bite my tongue to keep from telling you. But I don't know how you will like it. I say to myself, 'Billy, he enjoys to sleep so much. How mad will he get when the baby wakes up in the night and cries for milk?' I got to find out. Then I think of capons. I know you will have to build a nice dry room for the incubator. That will do for the baby's room when it gets a little older. It's winter and I know you got to look at the thermometer and stove in a baby's room just like an incubator. And Olga is good for capons, too.

"Billy, I am so proud of you that I cry a little when you get so mad—and then take such good care of the eggs. I say, 'Freda, you are lucky dame. Billy, he make damn fine father of the baby you going to get.'

"Then one day Wills calls on the phone. I find out about your movie house. So I send Olaf to buy the option."

"But why?" I cut in. "What's that got to do with——"

Freda's eyes filled up with tears. "Billy, don't you see? I don't want you to get out of practice being disturbed in the middle of the night! I got everything timed so careful. That's why I didn't let you start incubating till three weeks ago. I——"

The phone rang—once. Before we could gather ourselves it rang again—once. I grab the receiver.

"This is Doctor Hanson, talking from the Svendsons. Tell your wife it's twins. Mother and babies all doing nicely."

At that moment Cecil comes busting in, his whiskers sticking out straight. "Holy Jerusalem, boss, your chicks is hatching!"

"I'll say you timed it perfect," I tell Freda.

Five minutes later, she was streaking it down the road with Cecil in the Ford, and I, sitting and watching the chicks peck their way out of their shells, was trying to realize that fatherhood had overtook me.

About a month later, walking into the babe's room to look at the thermometer, I see the kid with a handful of Cecil's whiskers.

"Listen," I say. "Will you take that chin-mattress of yours out in the garage or somewhere? The babe's just had her bottle, and any stimulating emotion like laughter is bad for her. She's beginning to sleep all night long now, and I don't wish her routine broken."

When I drag him out in the dining-room, Freda is smiling. "What's the big joke?" I say. "Has your friend Olga eat up the front porch?"

"How many chicks you lost?" she asks Cecil.

"Ain't lost one per cent.," swears Cecil, sharpening his imagination a bit. "The boss got well-nigh a perfect hatch. Them chicks come out of the shell so strong and vigorous and sturdy I *couldn't* lose none."

Then Freda reads us a notice in the Philly paper she had. It said because so few farmers was doing much setting and incubating on account of the high price of eggs, the wholesalers predicted a great shortage of fancy poultry and capons during the spring and summer, with a ready market and record-breaking prices for same.

And that was the first time it hit me, that with money as tight as it was around our neighborhood, I'd of had to send out engraved passes to coax anybody into my movie house to hear me play piano.

Late that night, before turning in, I notice the babe as usual has her little hands outside the silk quilt. Trying to put them back in under without waking her up, I whisper to Freda, "Look at them fingers, will you? What a world-beater *she's* going to be on the old ivory key-board, after I teach her all *I* know."

Freda smacks a kiss on my mouth in her firm acrobatic manner. "Now I tell you something, Billy. Thelma Svendson, she's good friend of mine. Next time, she's promised me a boy!"

A Very Old Lady

by Charlotte Becker

HER presence, like a faint, old-fashioned scent,
Pervades with misty charm the quiet room,
Whose stately portraits and dim silks assume
An air of guarding her from turbulent
And hurried life without. Her days are spent
In leisured dreaming, and in delicate
Observances of this or that slight date
Which links her with still cherished sentiment.

Her fragile hands, pale, taper-tipped and long
Unoccupied, 'mid filmy laces rest;
Her gentle talk and tinkling voice suggest
The words and tune of some forgotten song;
While her slow smile, with wistful tenderness,
Covers the void of vanished love's caress.

F. O. B. Cambodia

Strange Things are Obliged to Happen when Occidental Newlyweds go Honeymooning in the Orient

By George F. Worts

Illustrations by Frank Spradling

THERE is, in the very heart of the Cambodian jungles, a temple where idols of copper, tin and silver alloy squat under a roof of mahogany and wrought gold upon a floor of solid silver. Eleven identical images of Buddha on alabaster slabs, with Indian diamonds of many carats in the center of their foreheads, loom from one stained gilt wall to the other. The hammered silver floor is nearly a half-inch thick and blackened by the feet of pilgrims. The doors of the temple are of teak inlaid with mother o' pearl from the South Seas; they are so thick that you can lay the palms of your hands side by side on the cool dark plane without reaching the edges.

Wind bells hang among the eaves and tinkle sweetly; the silver content in them is very high, and their voices are clear from the harsher timbre of bronze. On a still evening, when the northeastern monsoon is lying along the tops of the palms and bread-fruit-trees, the silver murmurings penetrate for many miles.

Inch for inch the Wat Pra Ngon is probably the richest temple on earth. The Wat Pra Keo of Bangkok, with its rainbow stucco, is gaudier; the Schwe-Dagon pagoda of Rangoon is, particularly at sunset, more spectacular; but the richness of the Wat Pra Ngon of Kungtala in Tunglat would tempt a saint.

During the first quarter of the sixteenth century the second king of the present dynasty began to build the Wat Pra Ngon, or the temple to the silver Buddhas. It became a passion not only with him, his son and his grandson, but with their subjects as well. They sacrificed their personal ambitions and their posterity's right to happiness in order to make their silver dream a metallic reality. Men and women, zealots all, stripped from their bodies their gold and silver ornaments—bracelets, neck-pieces, anklets and rings. All went into the crucible or under the mallet.

And as a reward for such spirited merit making, the Buddha of Kapilavastu has given the temple, so the priests say, immunity from thieves by surrounding it with friendly little devils in miniature pagodas.

Centuries were required by the people of Tunglat to recover from the bankrupt condition into which the three religious fanatics drove their state. Tunglat, with her unlimited natural resources, has gradually prospered. The present ruler of Tunglat is a very rich young man. His harem is one of the choicest in the Far East, containing upward of one hundred young and beautiful queens and concubines.

King Chaddore Wang Chot Shuddor received his education in American schools and an American university. He is a charming, dark-skinned, bright-eyed, far-sighted young monarch, having already imported for the benefit of his subjects and himself many of the mechanical marvels produced by the civilization across the world.

Tunglat is five hundred miles inland from the South China Sea. There is no railroad to the coast, yet he has installed in his capital an electric lighting plant, a sanitary water supply system, several dozen powerful automobiles, electric elevators, adding-machines, typewriters—and all of these came piece by piece, by river-boat and elephant, through five hundred miles of jungle from Saigon.

The pride of King Chaddore has been offended for many years by a low swamp in the form of a crescent which partly shuts in the capital of his kingdom. It breeds sickening odors, fever bearing insects, and poisonous snakes of all descriptions. Not many months ago an American periodical to which he regularly subscribes published an article dealing with the drainage of the Florida everglades. King Chaddore, upon reading the article, was visited by an inspiration.

The wheels of his modern organization began immediately to turn. The Minister of Agriculture dispatched a messenger to Saigon. In due time the cabled inquiry reached the desk of the sales manager of a steam-pump factory in Brooklyn. The sales manager complimented himself on having had the perspicacity to send one of his brightest youngsters to the Far East to pry open new territory. And presently the king's inquiry, backed by the sales manager's hearty approval, ticked over the ooze of the Pacific to Hongkong, where Benjamin Boldger was temporarily established.

TO APPRECIATE the peculiarly wretched state of mind in which the cablegram from the home office discovered Benjamin Boldger, it is first necessary to understand something of the rules governing that most tender of latter-day romances, a shipboard love-affair.

Most shipboard love-affairs, it is true, go the way of all flesh. You love her, or him, devotedly for a blissful period, and then you part with the likelihood of never meeting again. For a while afterward you permit yourself to gaze back upon your experience with tender and regretful sentiments; and then you begin to feel glad that you did not burn your bridges behind you. To be sure, exceptions occur; and Benjamin Boldger awoke one morning in Hong-kong to the conviction that he was one of them.

The pump salesman was still young enough to gratify many of his impulses, and the cablegram he sent off to the girl in the case shortly after receipt of the message from his sales manager was pathetic.

She had left the boat at Shanghai with a personally conducted tourist party bound for Peking. She was a Swahicklie, Pennsylvania, girl; she had traveled considerably, and the tourist party was made up principally of awful old bores. In no time to speak of she grew to loathe the wholesale methods with which the wonders of old China were served up to old gentlemen and elderly ladies who were concerned continually with their bodily comfort. Esther was young; she believed that romance and discomfort generally went hand in hand.

As far as her particular feelings for Benny Boldger were concerned, there had been far more gifted lovers on the Transpacific steamer, but Esther had had some slight experience at the hands of professional love-makers both of the domestic and the continental types, and in Benny Boldger's somewhat shy advances she beheld with the unerring penetration so characteristic of her, admirable, lasting qualities. In the approaches he made Benny was neither awkward nor overconfident; yet the very presence of her was always sufficient to throw him into a state of glowing confusion which secretly delighted her.

She explained the laws of shipboard love-affairs to him before she knew him well enough to know better. She told him that making love is the nicest way to kill time on a long sea-trip. Everybody does it, if there are men and girls enough to go round. Only all the time you must retain certain mental reservations.

Then, one night, a few days out of Honolulu, Benny artfully angled her away from the crowd and conducted her out into the blackness of the ship's forepeak under the shining, rippling tropical stars. And there, neither to her surprise nor against her wishes, he kissed her. She returned his somewhat blundering caress with an astonishing amount of genuine feeling; and she realized with some displeasure that poor Benny had been so unwise as to retain no mental reservations whatsoever.

His processes, it appeared, were primitive and direct. When she sincerely vouchsafed that he had stirred something very deep within her—although she wondered at the time if the sweet sea wind in their faces and the intoxicating pulsing of the low-drooping stars might not have something to do with it—he went into some detail regarding his plans and his prospects.

He himself realized, Benny admitted, that such surroundings as these might prove with a little perspective to have been misleading as far as she was concerned. For himself, he declared, the die was cast. He had never cared very much for any girl before.

Esther exceeded every ideal he had created for the woman he had always intended some day to marry. But he wanted to give her time to think it over. If his campaign for introducing the Brooklyn Automatic Steam-Pump into the Orient was anything like the success he planned it to be, he would return to New York and take charge of the Oriental end of the export department at a salary which would enable him to support a wife in comparative luxury. If a year from now she felt the way she now felt——

"You love me awfully much, don't you, Benny?" she murmured, nestling softly into the hollow of his arm and gazing dreamily past his white chin to where the Southern Cross rode upon the black velvet shield of the night.

"It hurts all the way down to my heels," Benny replied huskily as he swooped down and tasted her fresh lips again.

They parted at the warehouse floats in the Whangpo-kiang outside of Shanghai; and Esther did shed some realistic tears as the liner upon whose decks they had met and loved pulled out into the brown, rain-freckled stream for Manila and Hongkong, taking Benny away from her forever.

She knew she would retain for an uncomfortably long period that wistful picture of him leaning over the rail, with a cigaret trembling in his fingers, unuttered words forming on his lips.

Likewise, as the floats became obscure in the sifting rain, Benny took away with him a memory that he swore time would never obliterate—a slim, gracious figure in a silvery raincoat, with the saucy blue little hat tilted over one ear, her brown eyes radiant with moisture, her white-gloved fingers sending him a final farewell as she dwindled in size and became a blur against the red confusion of the galvanized iron warehouse.

When the process of falling in love passes beyond the nascent stage it is probably accompanied by more discomforts than any emotion to which the human cell is heir. Before the great floats were hidden by the clutter of sampans and junks, Benny declined into a moody phase from which none of the kindly jibes of fellow passengers who liked him and really sympathized, could arouse him. At the seat of his digestive organ he was attacked by a dull gnawing, a kind of weakening nausea that came and went. He looked haggard. His mirth lacked its customary snap and spontaneity.

By the time he reached Hongkong he was desperate. He had indeed burned his bridges. He stood the strain as long as human endurance could bear up under it, and on a bleak, wretched, foggy, typical April Hongkong morning, he sent off a pitiful cable appeal to Esther Carnamay, Grand Hotel des Wagon Lits, Peking—

> Can't stand it any longer please come first steamer Honeymoon old Cambodia nicer than snow and Peking slush. Oodles of it. Benny.

Esther's reply reached him next morning:

> Old darling neither can I coming on *Venezuela* all bridges burned simply dying for you oodles and oodles. Esther.

Benny neglected business all that morning and blew himself to a sedan chair to the Peak, where he stood for hours looking across Kowloon and the lavender and green hills beyond Hung Bom Bay to the silky jade-green layer of sea. No doubt he was merely manifesting the impulse which traditionally sends successful lovers to housetops.

HE LUNCHED at the Peak Hotel and in the afternoon, with a freed spirit and nothing to make him suffer except the agony of waiting, he plunged with his usual enthusiasm into the business at hand. He "sewed up" the South China territory for the Brooklyn Automatic Steam-Pump Company's superlative products in a matter of hours.

In fact, he was still surprised at the ease with which he had negotiated agencies for his concern all along the line, for he had come to China with the old-fashioned notion that the mills of Oriental business houses ground with maddening slowness. The old order had changed since the library book from which Benny had amassed his wide knowledge of Far Eastern business methods had been written and published. All of Asia, he discovered, was clamoring for manufactured products.

"Can you guarantee us delivery?" He encountered that question everywhere. And with the enlarged capacity of the Brooklyn Automatic Steam-Pump Company behind him, he was able to assure his prospective agents that he could. He found that a salesman could sell anything, from canned soup to steel bridges—if he could promise delivery. The industrial East had become a gold-mine of opportunity with the conclusion of the war.

Through friends Benny had all arrangements made for the reception of his fiancée. Hotel accommodations were difficult to secure, but he obtained a two-room suite at the Hongkong. A steam-launch was placed at his disposal by the manager of the Hongkong house with which he had established business connections; and he met Esther's steamer as soon as the port doctors released it from quarantine.

Esther was privately relieved and delighted to observe that her own nervousness would pass readily for the sweet calm of a well-regulated intellect in comparison with his own.

"Are you sure, Benny?" she demanded breathlessly, after he had rather clumsily kissed her. "Are you really, honestly sure about your bridges?"

"Are you?" he replied huskily.

She kissed him again, and that of course dismissed every possible shadow of a doubt.

They settled themselves hand in hand on the steam-launch and for a time did nothing but exchange long, wordless looks with tearfully bright eyes.

Benny finally shook himself slightly. "Everything is working out wonderfully," he told her. "Great Scott! Esther, they haven't had a good pump over here since 1913! Second-hand ones are selling for twice and three times their old list prices. I am going to clean up, Esther. I mean, *we* are going to clean up."

"Yes, dear," she said approvingly, squeezing his hand. "Now explain something, for I'm as curious as a cat. What did you mean by 'honeymoon old Cambodia?' I didn't know you were going to Indo-China."

Benny enlightened her. "I got a cable from Jimmy Dillon, the sales manager, the morning I cabled you. The king of a small state in Cambodia, about five hundred miles or so up-country from Saigon, wants me to look in on him and advise him about pumps for draining his swamps."

"How per-fectly won-derful!" Esther cried. "Will we rough it through the jungles and—everything?"

The conversation was suspended while they exchanged another long, vibrant look.

"Well, I don't know," he resumed. "Certainly I'm not going to have you subjected to any dangers or discomforts, not if I know about it!"

"You old darling," she cooed; "I adore dangers and discomforts. We'll probably be dreadfully disappointed. I imagine the king will receive you like visiting royalty. Then it will take weeks of formalities and ceremonies and barbaric banquets and weird celebrations—and finally he'll say in an unguarded moment that he'll take a dozen pumps and pay you in gold nuggets on the spot! Either that, or we'll take a Pullman from Saigon and a taxi from the station to the king's anteroom."

But Benny shook his head. "No one around Hongkong seems to know much about it. The French have made loads of improvements there of course. But if the trip is a risky one I'll give it up rather than take you where you won't be comfortable and happy."

"You're a dear boy," Esther informed him. "But you mustn't forget that the rougher it is the better I like it. I've camped out in Maine and Canada and on motoring-tours. You might as well get the idea out of your stubborn old head that I am going to let myself interfere with the success of your trip."

"But, sweetheart, you aren't," he protested.

"Or," she proceeded firmly and sweetly, "that I intend allowing you to go to places where it is too risky for me to go. You told me once, you wanted your wife to be your best pal; that's one of the reasons why I liked you so. And pals always share everything, pleasures and dangers, on a fifty-fifty basis. Now that that's settled we won't wrangle any more—not on my wedding-morn. It's unlucky, and you know what a superstitious little devil I am.

There's no one looking, Benny, and if you would really care to, you have a chance to show me how much you love me."

Even while he discharged this perfectly agreeable obligation Benny was visited by the ghostly suspicion that the girl he was about to endow with his name and fortunes could not with any degree of accuracy be described as a clinging vine.

That afternoon they were married in a little stone church on Kennedy Road. The *tai-pan*, or "number-one man," as the Chinese call the heads of business concerns, of the establishment with which Benjamin had opened his steam-pump agency, gave a dinner dance in the bride's honor at Repulse Bay. And two mornings afterward the happy couple sailed out of the harbor of Hongkong on a steamer bound for Saigon, the capital of French Indo-China, and the starting-place of their married adventures.

THE days grew warmer; the nights became brilliant with a mellow moon, billions of throbbing white and green stars, with the Southern Cross hauling itself higher and higher above the horizon. Furry green and purple valleys and twisted mountain chains running backward from yellow beaches presently appeared above a watery plain of emerald and amethyst—the coast of the Cambodian peninsula.

Their steamer crept past the many mouths of the Mekong one morning at dawn, picked up the pilot at the bar, and barely crawled with engines churning at full speed up an estuary boiling with muddy tide-water rushing back to the China Sea.

Esther was outspoken in her disappointment in Saigon. It had always been vaguely associated in her mind with palm-thatch huts on bamboo stilts, with charming reminders on every hand of the tea, opium, and spice trades, with incense fumes and camel caravans—in a word, a jungle river port fairly breathing the lore of the Orient of sailing-ship days.

And instead she discovered a vest-pocket edition of any typical flourishing French seaport town, with galvanized-iron warehouses along the arching waterfront, a mile of rugged wharves, green lawns, broad paved streets and boulevards dominated by new American automobiles, large hotels with full orchestras, running water and electric lights, banks, drug-stores, drinking fountains. There was left scarcely a trace of the jungle from which the site of modern Saigon had been hewn by the French invaders some seventy odd years before. Its air was that of Marseilles on a busy July Monday morning. Only the presence of tamarind and sao trees and here and there a red-trunked mahogany-tree along the sidewalks and the blazing white sun well overhead gave her any right to believe that she was not in France.

The American consul, to whom they presented themselves after obtaining accommodations at the strictly French Continental Palace Hotel, explained to Esther that the French colonizers both here and at Hanoi and Haiphong, further up the coast, were doing their utmost to make their settlements as homelike as possible by casting out reminders of the sinister jungle. To support this pitiful illusion the most renowned of French opera singers and theatrical troupes were imported thousands of miles every year.

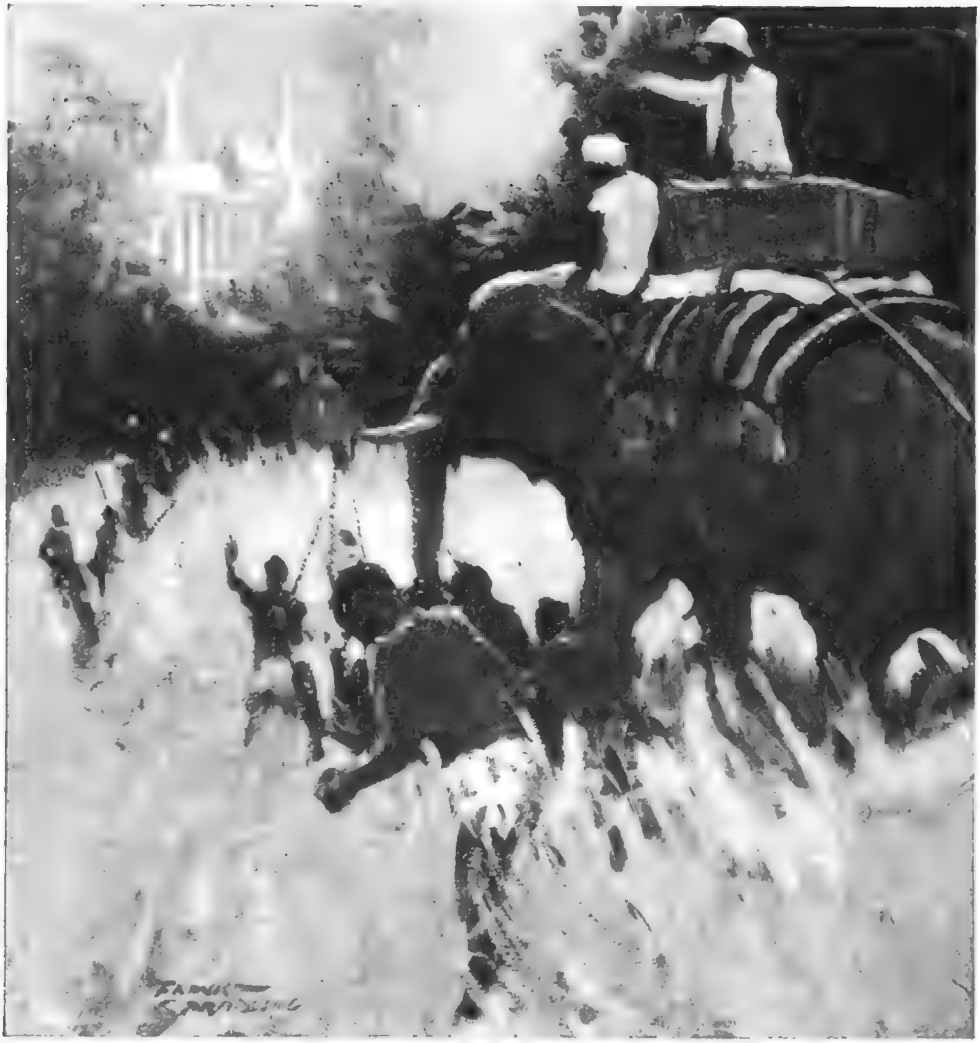
He was a pleasant, easy-talking young man with a weary, homesick look in his nice blue eyes, so Esther thought; and he took pains to assure her that she and her husband would encounter all the excitement they craved, and glimpse enough of darkest jungle to last them a lifetime, if they made the trip to Tunglat.

"They say it's all very *pukka* up in Kungtala now, since King Chaddore returned from New York with a headful of up-to-date ideas," the consul told Esther without even glancing at Benjamin. Indeed, the husband of Mrs. Boldger was fast making the discovery that men were far more anxious to discuss his business plans with her than with him. He generously went so far as to approve of these attentions, for Benjamin was more than proud of this new addition to the ancient and honorable Boldger family.

"Is the king hospitable?" Esther inquired pointedly.

"Well, he is and he isn't," the consul replied. "It all depends on what you mean by 'hospitable.' If you mean, will you be made comfortable during your stay in Kungtala—yes."

"I had an idea," the girl said with a twinkle, "that he might take us right into his palace, considering his admiration for New Yorkers."



A fat golden spire rose above the tree tops ahead, the spire of the richest of jungle temples, the skinned boys and girls and elders followed the elephants; and in the very shadow of the temple to the

"The people of Cambodia," the nice-looking young consul went on with a faint grin, "are noted all over the east for their hospitality. In every city and village you will find sleeping houses, very clean and comfortable; in Kungtala you'll find them not far from the famous temple to the eleven silver Buddhas. You're welcome as long as you care to linger."

"But King Chaddore—he wired personally for Mr. Boldger to come and inspect his—his swamps."

"I know it," the consul agreed. "It was I who specified the Brooklyn Automatic Steam-Pump Company, knowing the character of their products and the fact that the plant has been enlarged recently to handle the new business they're going out after. But if you won't think I'm taking liberties I'd like to tell you about an unpleasant situation which American salesmen have brought about."

"Shoot! Go the limit," Benjamin urged him cordially.

"It's like this, Mr. Boldger," the consul explained, turning to him: "The East just

Wat Pra Ngon. A procession of naked brown— eleven silver Buddhas the long procession halted.

now is flooded with American salesmen. You know yourself that the herd is made up of goats as well as sheep. Some of them are out here representing legitimate American business houses; and some of them are doing their—pardon me, Mrs. Boldger—their damnedest to give American business a black eye.

"You probably know that during the war and for a long time afterward we had a great deal of trouble all over the East, from India to Japan, getting hold of manufactured goods of any description, owing to the shortage of ships and the demands of the home markets, labor and raw material shortage. Conditions are going to ease up soon—we're beginning to get regular shipments of stuff from Europe and America, but the demand for everything under the sun is still so great that the buyer can't or won't discriminate.

"We had a fellow through here a few months ago selling condensed milk and other canned stuff. He didn't take the bother to look me up, as American salesmen usually do; but I did go out of my way to look up his firm. They weren't in Bradstreets or Dun, and I couldn't find a reference to them in any of the trade journals.

"He was selling this stuff at the prices asked for the best-known brands. And after it had been delivered and paid for, the merchants he'd loaded up began coming to me with kicks. The milk was hardly anything more than chalk and water— a really dangerous article. You see, milch cows won't stay alive in this part of the world. Children must drink the canned article; and you can realize how dishonest any concern is to send out men selling inferior milk."

"It's an outrage!" Esther muttered indignantly. "Why don't you put a stop to it?

The consul smiled faintly and shrugged. "The British have boards of trade to take care of such people. Payment for a shipment is not made until the goods have been appraised by a board of trade expert. If it falls below the specifications, say, twenty per cent., just that percentage is deducted when the bill is paid.

"And the reason why King Chaddore isn't receiving American salesmen more hospitably is that some of these fly-by-nighters have been selling him inferior stuff. The representative of an unknown electric-lighting apparatus factory went up there some time ago and unloaded thousands of piasters worth of junk on him. It took fifty elephants more than two weeks to cart the dissembled parts from Angkor to Kungtala. And when it was set up it wouldn't work—and it never will work.

"You'll find King Chaddore doing business now on a different basis. Not F. O. B. Brooklyn, but C. I. F. Cambodia. Not a cent down. Payment as soon after delivery as your machinery makes good.

"I'm sorry he hasn't notified me that arrangements have been made for your trip through Tunglat to Kungtala. But he hasn't. Call on me if I can help, but the trip is really not difficult. You go from here to Phnom-Penh by one of the river-boats, and from there up the Tonlé-sap and across the Great Lake by sampan."

"How do we go from Angkor to Kungtala?" Esther was curious to know.

The American consul smiled his wistful smile at her. "If the Kra-Huong is dry, I'm afraid you'll have to go by elephant."

"Isn't the dry season on?" Benjamin put in anxiously.

"The dry season is on," the consul admitted darkly.

"Hurray! I hope it's as dry as a New York cabaret!" cried the third member of the group.

SOME people are like some stories; you know exactly how they are going to work out before the introduction is over. The converse, on the other hand, is equally true. It had not taken Benjamin Boldger all this time to make the discovery that he had been fortunate enough to marry the other kind of person. Yet it discouraged him now and then when he realized that he would probably never really know the girl he had married; and in this supposition Esther upheld him at every fair opportunity.

Benjamin had frequently referred before his marriage to such-and-such a woman as one of the clinging-vine type, or the vampire type, or the independent type, or the high-brow type; he had not believed it possible, before his marriage, that all of these types and many others in addition might be compressed into one compact individual.

He had vowed in his callower days when his yearnings toward specific qualities were being molded, that he would when the time came steer a wide course to avoid the independent type of woman. As far back as he could remember he had desired a wife who would depend largely upon his masculinity. But not a clinging vine. Heavens, no!

Esther, then, to consider her, was like beholding some extraordinary rare stone which was as cruelly bright and sophisticated as a diamond when you looked at it from one side, soft and velvety and warm like a ruby when you happened to glimpse it at another angle, and as mysteriously fascinating as the green or purple depths of emerald or amethyst from still other points of view.

At all times her physical perfection was delightful to Benjamin; her skin was like peaches or rose petals; her eyes, while merry and sad, snapping and shining and glowing, by turns, were invariably beautiful and clear and brown; her lips reminded the infatuated man of a sweet cherry hanging pendulous from the twig. And the erectness of her suberb little figure would have brought envy into the eyes of a boy scout, if a boy of boy-scout age could envy any woman.

Sometimes she would take him into her arms with a wholesome and hungry little laugh and kiss him as an adoring daughter might. At other times she would discuss his business plans with briskness and wisdom. And at still other times she would issue orders to stupid or disobedient coolies, waiters and sampan boys with a sharpness and curtness that positively astonished him.

He had not dreamed that marriage involved such a liberal education, but it would be libelous to the truth to say that he did not enjoy every lesson he received.

The afternoon of their arrival in Saigon he was shaving in their bedroom at the Continental Hotel when Esther, flushed of cheek and sparkling of eye, bounded in with three Annamite coolies at her heels burdened with parcels and packages of all sizes and descriptions. After what she described as her loot had been disposed of on the bed and the coolies were tipped and on their way rejoicing, he turned a lather-layered countenance to her.

"I thought you were going shopping," he said dryly. "I thought women never bought anything when they shopped."

"I have been making purchases," Esther corrected him, sitting on the bed and fanning herself with her sun-helmet. "Everything we will need on our jungle junket, from hip-boots to cigarets. I had some trouble finding your kind, but I finally got 'em.

"Benny! You should have seen me loping up the Rue Catinat in my rickshaw with a parade of runners half a block long bringing up the rear with the loot! It was a scream, Benny! Now I want to show you what I'm billed to appear in in the great elephant act. You'll probably curl up your toes and die. Looky!"

She extricated a small bundle done up in straw paper from the confusion, unwrapped it, and shook out for Benjamin's inspection a pair of diminutive corduroy riding-breeches. "Aren't they heavenly?"

"What do I wear?" her husband huskily replied, permitting the lather to dry on his skin.

"Men's size," she replied demurely. "Benny, I've been a regular Shylock, and I don't believe I've forgotten a single item. Most of the things I picked up in a shop run by a marvelous old Chinese from the Province of Haata, homelier than Confucius and wiser than Solomon in all his glory. We've been wrangling and drinking white jasmine tea all afternoon."

"What are the hip-boots for?"

"The leeches."

"What leeches?" he gasped.

"Honey, Foo Tang has been through these jungles all the way to the mines at Chuntabun, in Siam; and he knew exactly what we would need. He says the leeches drop down on you from the trees without asking your permission or saying a word, and generally attach themselves to your legs. And they suck blood!" She grinned delightedly. "Isn't it horrible?"

"I wish you'd stay here and let me make that trip alone," her husband muttered. "What's that?" He indicated a narrow roll of soft baby-blue flannel.

"Our cholera belts. We wrap them around us at night, and they keep our tummies from catching cold. He had some brighter ones, red and purple, but I think these are adorable, don't you? Here are the sun helmets, big, wide-brimmed ones, so the sunbeams won't touch that sensitive spot between our shoulder-blades. And here's tinned food, mosquito-netting, canvas bed-rolls, cooking utensils, and a water-filter. Foo Tang says we must boil our water at least one hour and filter it four times. The jungle is very septic—I have a pint of iodin for that, in case of cuts or bruises. Did you see about the boat?"

"Yes."

"When do we start?"

"After dinner."

"To-night?"

"Yes. And we're due in Phnom-Penh Saturday."

"Gracious!" Esther unwrapped another parcel and opened a small blue glass bottle full of white capsules. She dumped four of these into the palm of one hand, swallowed two of them and extended the other two gellatinous cartridges to Benjamin. "Take these at once, Benny."

"What is it?"

"Quinin. We have to take four of them apiece every day—to fight the jungle germs. Isn't it thrilling, Benny?"

The look of doubt and unwillingness had not yet left Benjamin's eye; and Esther attended him with uneasiness.

"By George!" he growled with determination. "I've a good mind——"

"Of course you have, Benny!" she stopped him with a little wail. "Do you know what it is about our marriage I like so much?"

"What is it?" her husband replied suspiciously.

"We're such great little pals," she informed him enthusiastically. "Here we are, getting ready to romp through the Cambodian jungle all by our lonelies, like a couple of kids at a picnic. Isn't it great?"

"Wonderful," her husband agreed despondently.

"Do you know another reason why I'm so downright thankful, Benny?"

"I'll bite," said Benny from under the moving edge of the razor.

Her reply was delivered in a deep and vigorous voice.

"Because you're representing a sound, solid, old, established pump factory and not selling tinned chalk water to helpless Annamites!"

A LARK into unknown and perilous fields generally inspires in the young an ecstasy of adventurous enthusiasm. The joint belief of the Boldgers that romance went hand in glove with discomfort was their joint good fortune: The river-steamer, a craft of about eight hundred tons, on which they made the two-day trip down the Saigon River to the Mekong, and up the Mekong to the Tonlé-sap where Phnom-Penh is situated, provided them with discomfort in a charming variety of guises.

Their stateroom was small and stuffy; the two meals per day prepared after the French custom were inferior and unsatisfying; and all night long on the deck outside their cabin deck passengers, natives, gambled, fought, made love, and discussed controversial topics in shrill, jabbering voices. The Boldgers in their cramped little stateroom were unable to sleep, but they did not mind, for here was adventure in the raw. One Annamite was cut up dreadfully by another Annamite's knife. The cause of it was a woman with golden skin. And a golden tropical moon made a fairyland of the hissing water of the river and the mangrove-hidden banks gliding past.

The only other cabin passengers were French tourists, gay with the latest chatter of the Parisian boulevards, who were bound for the ruins of the Cambodian temple at Angkor, a building of rotting stone whose construction is shrouded in the mists of a forgotten century—the chosen abode for vampire bats, tarantulas, scorpions and poisonous snakes, despite the heroic efforts of the Colonial Government.

The Mekong wound through mile after mile of fruitful plains overgrown with coconut-palms, cotton-trees, betel-palms, and tamarind-trees. At noon of the second day they reached Phnom-Penh, the capital of Cambodia, where they embarked for Angkor by sampan.

A young and flirtatious French officer, wearing upon the left breast of his white tunic the Military Medal and several bright divisional citations of the recent war, verified the American consul's guess that the Kra-Huong from the Great Lake to Kungtala was unnavigable at this period of the year. Later, when they were jolting along a trail in an ox-cart with their paraphernalia, the Boldgers understood why.

The widest bends of the Kra-Huong were no more than forty feet across. Its bed was yellow clay, steaming and sizzling in the intense sunlight, moistened only by the squirmings of sleeping crocodiles and snakes imbedded until the melting snows on the Himalayas a few thousands of miles away and the rains of the Cambodian wet season should again send the churning brown flood between its banks.

At Moukchen, with the assistance of the young French officer who obligingly accompanied them that far, they obtained elephants and guides—four rolling mountains of gray flesh surmounted by as many bright-eyed, golden-skinned Karen boys, Cambodian aborigines who inherited their skill in handling elephants from a thousand generations of elephant tamers. The Karens build their villages on the ridges of the highest hills; and their barbaric instincts and phenomenal understanding of the mightiest and wisest of land beasts is a byword throughout the whole of Asia.

The Boldgers were fortunately seasoned travelers. The rolling glide of the elephants did not make them seasick as it does so many novices; only the swishing of low branches in their faces was trying. That day they saw no wild things in the forest with the exception of a naked brown dwarf and his equally naked brown mate, who scampered off in tandem formation through the underbrush as they approached and climbed with the agility of orang-utans into a web of swinging giant creepers as the caravan went by.

They stopped at noon for lunch of tinned biscuits, tinned salmon, boiled rice and Foochow tea, the preparation of which Esther supervised, according to the instructions of the wise Foo Tang. Early in the evening they pitched their tent in a clearing; and presently the odors of the jungle, withheld during the long stifling day, were released as if a million unseen buds and blossoms were unfolding.

A lacy mist steamed up from the earth and made of the jungle lanes vague and alluring tunnels to delightfully mysterious possibilities. Esther understood why folks whose lives were simple and natural could people such silvery glens with elves and goblins. The sweetness of flowery odors creeping into the darkened tent and under her mosquito-bar had the ripe palpable fragrance characteristic of hothouse-plants and filled her with longings and fancies too delicate and exotic to be defined.

THE following days, while stifling hot and tormenting with dust, were filled with entertaining happenings; and the novelty and beauty of the things she saw and the thrill of the very undertaking made the time pass swiftly enough. The nights were cool and sweet with the perfume of the red jasmine, the frangipanni, the maid o' the night, the tuberose, and the narcissus.

Once they saw a black panther, lying motionless along the limb of a breadfruit-tree, at least fifty feet above their heads; but the animal remained inactive, following their progress with evil slanting green eyes. Again, they came upon the fresh tracks of a wild elephant herd, and the Karen boys had their hands full, for it is a trait of every civilized elephant, as of many men who reform from some dissipating habit, to carry the light to their wild, unenlightened fellows. And one morning Esther discovered a kreit adder, a deadly serpent indeed, sunning itself in the sand before their tent. Before she could open her mouth to shriek for Benjamin, the adder flicked through the brush, leaving a stream of sparkling gold dancing upon her optic nerve.

"There is one sure way to tell if a snakebite is poisonous," she informed her husband over their breakfast of coffee, toast and marmalade. "Bite a chili leaf. If it has the natural chili taste the snake that bit you was non-poisonous. If it has a strange, unnatural taste—you're a gone goose. If a snake bites you on the pulse of your heel you'll likewise go home in a wooden kimono."

"Who told you that?" Benny demanded admiringly.

"Foo Tang," she enlightened him.

"But I don't know what chili tastes like," he reasoned.

"Then you'll never know what bit you, dear," his wife replied.

Their camp was pitched in a grove of marvelous flame-palms which took their name from the graceful scarlet trunk. On the other side of the trickling Kru-Huong was a tangle of trees and vines with here and there an orchid of preposterous coloring and monstrous formation peeping out from the green. Many of these with their orange and scarlet and flesh colored petals reminded Esther of the horrible but fascinating sea creatures dragged up by the fishermen from great depths and exhibited in glass tanks under high air-pressure in the Honolulu aquarium.

There were vicious attacks by swarms of green flies which endeavored to nest in their hair and systematically devour their scalps, by clouds of mosquitoes which were no larger than gnats but endowed with astonishing power to inflict pain.

As for the leeches, which dropped from the swishing branches uninvited and unannounced and attached themselves to their persons despite precautionary measures, Esther would never, she knew, outgrow her horror at the very thought of them. She wore her hip-boots strapped tightly and heavy stockings under them, and she concluded finally that a leech could find its way through a solid wall of steel. No night passed without her dreaming of them, or of the mammoth elephant leeches which bored through the inch-thick hide of an elephant and, unless killed, swelled to the proportions of bologna sausages. One of the Karen boys, who spoke understandable French, told her of horses found in the morning under trees where they had been tethered the night before—mere skin bags of bones with elephant leeches lying about them like so many rum bottles.

But these shocking reminders of the death that was concealed on every hand by the suave and brilliant beauty of the tropical forest only gave spice to the journey. Indeed, Esther considered herself an exceptionally fortunate bride to have been indulged with a honeymoon so uniquely romantic.

Came the day when the Karen boy on the foremost elephant waved his bare arms and shouted; and Esther turned to look behind her at Benjamin, and they laughed at each other.

A fat golden spire rose above the treetops ahead, which was the spire of the richest of jungle temples, the Wat Pra Ngon. They came to a scattered settlement of huts on bamboo props built on canals, slimy with brown mud and green water, which wandered through groves of palms and orange-trees. Their way led through this marshy settlement to a denser one, while the capital city of Kungtala, a city of shacks and more pretentious cane structures, rose up around them.

A procession of naked brown-skinned boys and girls and elders, sometimes clothed in sarongs and sometimes not, followed the elephants; and in the very shadow of the temple to the eleven silver Buddhas the long procession halted.

Small houses of bamboo and rattan lined both sides of a short lane. Each of the dozen or more yards was shaded by spiny palmettos and banana-plants. And any of these little houses they cared to select, so their French-speaking guide informed Esther, they were at liberty to occupy. They were guest houses.

She chose an airy building of intricately woven brown rattan with a floor of oiled teakwood. The single room was furnished with but two piles of woven fiber mats, for which Esther at once substituted their folding cots. She and Benjamin spent the remainder of the morning chasing spiders—fat, hairy fellows—and it was Benjamin who spoke aloud the belief in both their minds that their stay in the capital of Tunglat would not be longer than necessary.

AFTER lunch he set out afoot with catalogs and price-lists toward the center of the city, accompanied by the Karen head-boy and several score of curious and friendly Cambodians. Esther preferred to explore the vicinity while he sold the king his pumps.

It was fortunate that the American consul had prepared Benjamin for the reception he would no doubt receive, thanks to those American salesmen who had preceded him. The Karen led him toward a group of unpainted wood buildings surrounded by a moat and a fence of bamboo palings. As he drew nearer he heard the strange but familiar sound of clicking typewriters. A native guard, wearing a red sarong and bearing in his arms a hard-hitting Swiss army rifle, admitted him across a bridge and through a narrow gate.

Benjamin had fortunately come to the right place. The first building he entered, a low, gloomy structure of some hard wood, housed the offices of the Department of Agriculture; and Benjamin was presently having his hand shaken briskly by an intelligent-looking, keen-eyed young man of business-like comportment, who informed him in good English with a slight French accent, that he was the Minister of Agriculture of Tunglat and a graduate of the Wisconsin State Agricultural College.

"His Majesty has instructed me to explain the situation to you," the Minister of Agriculture said, with the vigor and brusqueness which seemed to characterize him. "I have gone over the ground quite thoroughly, Mr. Boldger. It should take us no more than an hour or two to settle upon the number of pumps and the type necessary for our undertaking."

The business-like young Cambodian conducted the somewhat flustered pump salesman into a small room which might have been an office in any up-to-date American business establishment. Filing cabinets lined the varnished walls. Overhead a two-bladed electric fan stirred the sultry air. In the corner a youth with a tiny mustache industriously pecked away at an American typewriter.

The Minister of Agriculture wasted no time upon polite preliminaries. He snapped a sharp command at the typewriting youth. The youth leaped to his feet, opened a mahogany cabinet, and laid a roll of tough white paper on the desk.

When the paper was unrolled Benjamin found himself gazing with interest, respect and profound admiration at a contour map of Kungtala and the region surrounding it.

Benjamin cast an expert eye from one contour to another, compared the blue-inked elevation figures with the red-inked depression marks, and drew his professional conclusions, which were that his services were required only in a decorative capacity.

"What are these things?" he asked, pointing out several brown dots on the crescent of indicated swamp area.

"They are foot-power pumps, similar to those employed by the Chinese in their rice-fields. They were unsatisfactory. The water seeped in faster than we could pump it out."

"Naturally," Benjamin agreed crisply, brightening in the belief that he had at last found an expression for his usefulness. "You're trying to drain ten thousand square miles of swamp. You'll have to raise a dam all around this crescent, and shut the other low area completely off."

"Yes," the Minister of Agriculture acquiesced pleasantly. "We have already anticipated that. We have five dredges on the way here now for that purpose. We expect to have the dam in place before your company makes delivery of the pumps."

Benjamin frowned. "That will leave how many square miles of swamp to be drained and pumped?" he asked.

"Approximately three thousand," he was informed. "About two thousand of that is considerably below the level of the river, even in the dry season. Can you estimate from my map how many of your pumps will be required, or will it be necessary for you to inspect the swamp?"

"If this map can be relied upon—" Benjamin began.

"It can," the other headed him off briefly. "The survey was made under my personal supervision."

Benjamin reached for a pencil; the Minister of Agriculture reached for a gold-mounted fountain pen; and for a little less than an hour the two of them carried on a discussion in the mathematical dialect of pumping. And at the end of that time, with the number of pumps and their specifications agreed upon, Benjamin concluded that his trip to Kungtala had been taken, as far as his technical assistance was concerned, purely for pleasurable purposes.

"We will buy these pumps," the young man told him, "at C. I. F. and practical demonstration here. The thirty-eight thousand five hundred dollars will bear interest at six per cent. from date of delivery at Saigon. The insurance and freight will of course bear no interest."

"That's fair enough," Benjamin decided promptly.

The Minister of Agriculture rose from his swivel-chair and extended a brown palm with his business-like, impersonal smile. "When will you start for the coast?" he inquired politely.

"If we can get away to-morrow early," Benjamin replied, "we will catch the weekly boat at Phnom-Penh. I believe we will start to-morrow."

The Minister of Agriculture courteously expressed his regrets at this abrupt leave-taking. "I'm sure his Majesty would be delighted to see you, but he is up north on an elephant hunt, and will probably not return to Kungtala until Sunday."

THE pump salesman returned to the *sala* with the feeling that the Far East, no matter what writers of authoritative volumes said to the contrary, was waking up rapidly enough to give the rest of the world something to lie awake nights and worry about. A thirty-eight thousand five hundred dollar deal closed in less than two hours! Benjamin felt sore about it, too, as any good salesman feels when a customer with whom he eagerly plans to wage battle with his sharpest weapons proceeds to take the matter out of his hands and sell himself.

Benjamin found his bride at the rest-house entertaining the children of the neighborhood and several adjoining neighborhoods with the contents of French bonbon tins.

"Did you land him, honey?"

"It's all settled."

"So soon?"

"Yep. We start back in the morning."

"Well," Esther proceeded with her characteristic enthusiasm; "I've been busy too. This king must be a wonder, Benny. He has twenty-nine automobiles in one garage. I counted 'em."

"Where does he drive them all?" Benjamin was curious to know.

"That bothered me too. So I investigated. There's a road leading from the palace out on a little peninsula into the swamp. It's not two miles long; and it's the only road in his whole kingdom! Every day he takes out one of his cars and exercises it on that boulevard. You'd never guess what he named that street."

"I give up."

"Riverside Drive! Isn't that a scream, Benny? I tried to get into the palace, but a big dark Cambodian only let me peek in."

"His Majesty is out elephant hunting," Benny explained.

"Is he? Well, his Majesty certainly loves his New York. That entrance hall looks like a New York hotel lobby! Honest! There's an electric elevator running upstairs, and a boy in a red uniform with brass buttons operating it! Can you beat it?"

"You've been pretty busy," Benny guessed.

Esther gave a weary sigh in confirmation. "I've seen all the sights. After dinner I want to take you into the silver temple. It fairly gives you the creeps in the daytime, and at night it must be perfectly dreadful! There are eleven squatting Buddhas lined up against the back wall and every one of them has a diamond this big in the center of its forehead! I suppose they aren't really valuable or they wouldn't be left there like that."

And so, when dinner was over, they went through the dusk to the Wat Pra Ngon. The compound was filled with black and jumpy shadows. The temple doorway was an oblong of blackness from which the very vapors of blackness seemed to be exhaled.

Inside the high arching space the blackness was pinked here and there by yellow spots of light where candles on long silver stems were burning. The fumes of sandalwood incense from invisible pots stole through the heavy air. And ghostly figures with shining dusky skins moved through the velvety half-darkness. From high aloft there began to fall the silvery petals of sound released by the tinkling eaves bells.

Esther clutched her husband's arm, shivering.

"Isn't it gorgeous? Doesn't it remind you of a Willkie Collins' story—or Kipling?" she demanded in an awed whisper.

Benjamin boldly proceeded to the line of silver Buddhas, and a priest in yellow robes glided away from him. He stood at the base of the central idol with his hands on his hips, his head a foot lower than the jewel glowing like a baleful eye.

A wave of sentimental feeling flowed over Esther. How romantic he looked! So tall, confident, splendid—with his jaunty helmet and white drill against the dim and lustrous background! She crept beside him and snuggled her arm through his. "Benny, are great minds running in the same channel?"

He nodded seriously. "Yes—that one. What wicked fire! It looks almost alive!"

"How I'd love to have it!" Esther sighed, and she believed she detected a tremor along his arm.

"You—you would?"

"Benny, we haven't a single souvenir—not a thing to show people we really've been here," she whispered, as Eve no doubt whispered on a similar occasion.

Benjamin shook himself. He glanced down at her, and his eyes seemed to glint and glow in the candlelight.

Tall shadows were gliding into the temple. He saw one in a dark corner lift an obscure object above his head, and bring it down.

A harsh bellow, like the fog siren of an ocean liner, burst upon their ears in the frightful vibrations of their first and last impression of the savage temple drum of the Kamooks. The hideous reverberations dimmed and died away to ominous rumblings.

Other ghosts flitted into the temple, treading silently on the blackened silver floor; the temple was filling. And the lovers, flitting through the night to their *sala*, were like two ghosts themselves.

ESTHER awoke with a rough hand upon her bare arm, a harsh whisper crowding into her uppermost ear. "Get dressed! Hustle!" Benjamin hissed.

"What's up? How long have you been—Gracious! You're dressed!"

"We're starting now," he told her with an attempt to suppress his nervousness that only emphasized it.

"What time is it?"

"About four."

Esther crawled out from her shroud of mosquito-netting and proceeded to dress. She heard in the lane the heavy, almost soundless, trampling of the elephants.

"No breakfast?"

"No breakfast."

"Has anything happened, Benny?"

He seemed to hesitate. "N-no."

"You look as white as a sheet! Why! You can hardly hold your cigaret! What is it, Benny?"

"Hurry," he said.

Into the dissolving darkness of the before-dawn they slipped. The elephants, as though they too were aware of a dark and mystifying undercurrent, neglected their usual morning salaaming and trumpeting. The boys sitting upon their necks with crossed legs were like living Buddhas in an Oriental dream.

And not until lunch time was it given to Esther to learn the reason for this stealthy flight.

The Karens were watering the elephants at a pool some distance away when Benjamin, with a furtive glance behind him, reached into the breast pocket of his white tunic.

"Heavens!" cried Esther, staring with wild brown eyes at the little ball of dancing white fire rolling upon her husband's extended palm. "You took it from that Buddha——"

"You wanted it," he whispered hoarsely. "You wanted a souvenir, didn't you? Well, here it is. It's yours."

"Oh, Benny, you shouldn't!" But she lifted the little ball of white fire in her fingers, and delight came and displaced her expression of fright.

"What a beauty! How glorious!"

"That," Benjamin proceeded steadily, "Is my wedding-present to the most wonderful——"

"I know, dearest," she hushed him in a tender little voice. "But don't—don't terrible things happen to people who do such things? Aren't they followed often all the way to London, or New York—or anywhere?"

"We are living in the twentieth century," he said reasonably.

"Yes, of course we are, dear, but these

people, these Oriental savages, they're living in the tenth. You know what fanatics—" She paused as she saw the unhappiness in his eyes. Of course we'll keep it—and hurry! We'll travel like a gale!"

Now one does not, strictly speaking, travel like a gale on any tamed elephant. Their progress in fact seemed to them snail-like. It told on Benjamin. Esther threw off her fears with her usual buoyancy. Esther renewed the soothing thought that that stone wasn't really very valuable—just some wonderful sort of brilliant, at most. They both came to believe this, but of course no such arguments really quieted their consciences. The fact was that Benny had yielded to an impulse to please Esther, and Esther had not been brave enough to hurt him by a refusal; and neither of them had quite realized, in that remote and unreal world, what they were doing. All of which doesn't, of course, in the least excuse them. Neither succeeded in casting out the feeling that behind them, traveling always a little behind them, vengeful priests of the Wat Pra Ngon were creeping.

They fortunately were able to secure passage from Saigon to Calcutta on the *Colusa*, an American ship; and for a time they were relieved. Yet the stolen diamond came between them, like a yawning cavern of uneasiness when they were alone.

In Singapore they were trailed one evening along the seawall by footpads; they were positive that the cowardly shadows were emissaries from the temple in Kungtala. And Esther wondered what fiendish scheme King Chaddore was fostering to avenge the pilfering of the holy temple of his forefathers. Distance, she knew, meant nothing, when the mills of offended Oriental gods began grinding.

Benjamin breathed easier when, as time went by and he took up his new labors in the New York office, no cancellation came for the Tunglat pump order. His expedition, in the eyes of his superiors, had been little less than a triumph. Even with the exorbitant rentals prevailing, he could afford in his capacity of Oriental Trade Manager of the export department, to establish his bride in cheerful quarters on Riverside Drive. The stolen diamond was shown boastfully to no friends; it lay in a safe-deposit box, while its sinister shadow lay upon Benjamin and his wife. That his crime should be overlooked was unbelievable. Months passed. No dark-skinned fanatic from the far-away Cambodian jungles appeared.

And one day there came to Benjamin's desk a square blue envelope marked personal, bearing in one corner a canceled Saigon postage stamp, and in another the coat of arms of King Chaddore.

He tore it open nervously. It contained a slip of white paper folded once. When he read it, Benjamin turned red, then white, and all but fainted away. He took a taxicab to the apartment.

Esther turned pale when she beheld his expression.

"Gracious, honey; what on earth has happened? Is it—is it——"

Benjamin's trembling fingers removed the slip of paper from the envelope and held it for her to read.

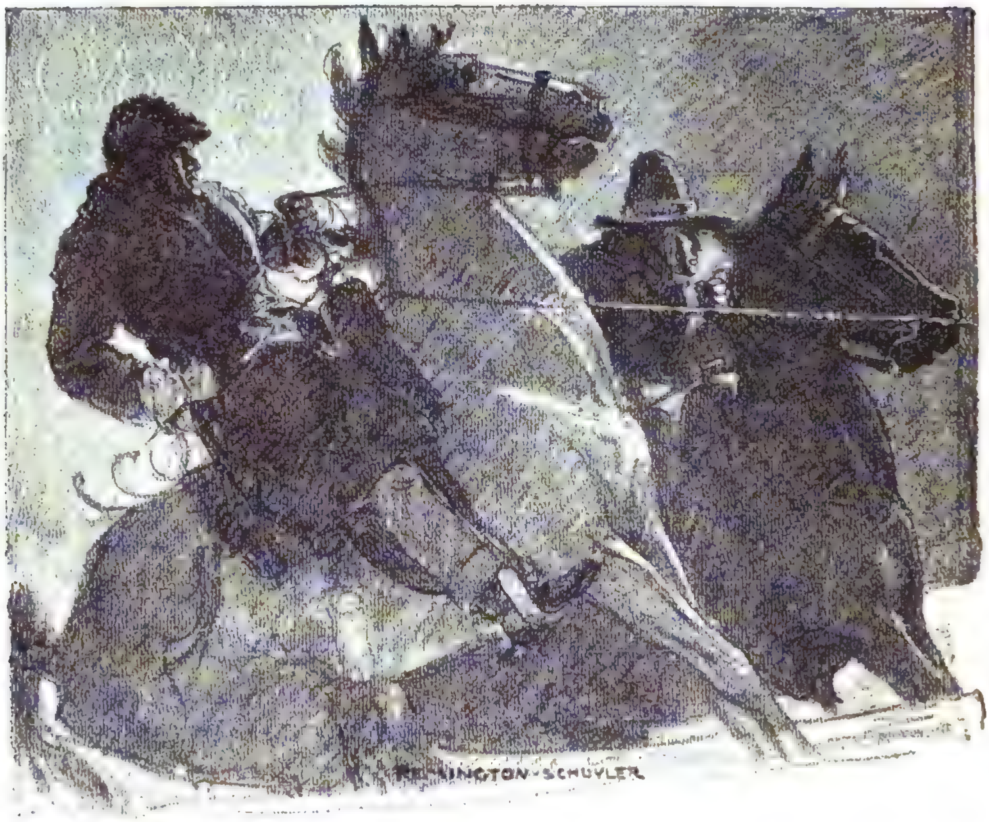
She grasped one corner. Black type across the top signified that it originated from the Department of Internal Revenue, Kungtala, Kingdom of Tunglat, Cambodia.

In neat, crisp typewriting between the faint parallel blue lines underneath she read:

"*To Benjamin Boldger, Brooklyn Automatic Steam-Pump Co., Dr. One 3-carat diamond from forehead of No. 6 Buddha, Wat Pra Ngon. . . .* $1775."

And in the firm, square handwriting of the most up-to-date of jungle monarchs was written across one corner in blue ink:

"*Kindly remit promptly, or we will be compelled to place this account in the hands of our New York attorneys.*"



The Rider of Golden Bar*

WHEN the astute gentry who controlled the political destinies of Crocker County sensed a growing distrust among the voters, they disarmed criticism by nominating Billy Wingo for sheriff. The popularity of the young ranger insured carrying the next election, and the party wheel-horses were confident of their ability to control him when in office.

"Billy's too easy-going and good-natured to do anything but drink when he's led to water," was the reassuring comment of Tip O'Gorman, the county boss, to the doubting Thomases among his henchmen.

Jack Murray, who sought the office for himself, protested in vain; and the Tuckleton boys, a gang of notorious cattlemen, were openly disgruntled at the prospect of having a sheriff who might not be sufficiently tractable. To complicate a delicate situation, Murray, after seeking consolation in liquor, shot up Riley Tyler, one of Wingo's friends, entirely without provocation. When Billy took the trail in pursuit of the fleeing coward, Murray prepared to shoot him from ambush, a plan that was spoiled by Hazel Walton, who divined his purpose and warned Wingo in the nick of time.

O'Gorman publicly contributed to the reward offered for Murray's capture and privately warned him to keep out of the neighborhood until after election, when the affair could be patched up.

The new sheriff, unaware of the catspaw part he was expected to play, took his honors lightly; he was much more concerned

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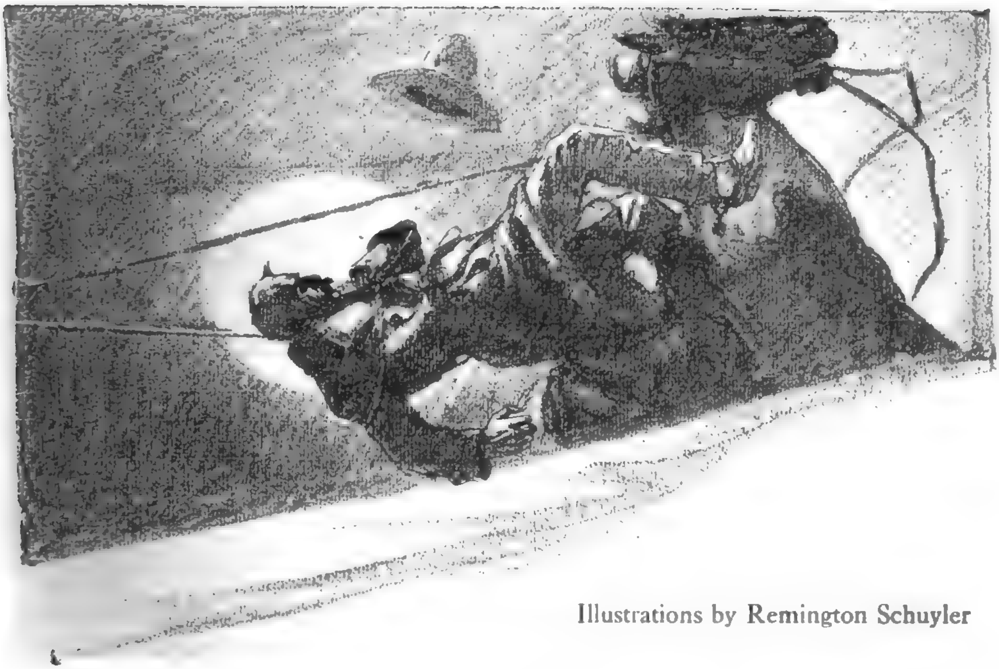


Illustrations by Remington Schuyler

Two ropes shot out simultaneously. The pony stopped abruptly. The judge flew backward from the saddle and hit the snow on the back of his neck.

By William Patterson White

Youth is cruelly tried when love and duty point in opposite directions

about the outcome of his love for the beautiful girl whose courage had saved his life. Hazel reciprocated his affection, but her love was a torture because of fear for his safety. Realizing the unscrupulous character of his enemies and the danger of his position, she implored him to resign. Billy was adamant against her pleas.

"Listen," he said, in a voice that trembled as he repeated the only solution his duty would permit him to entertain, "marry me now and we'll see it through, you and I, together."

Hazel shook her head. "I can't—I can't," she whispered, and added with most human logic, "I don't believe you love me."

At which he was moved to wrath. "I've asked you for the last time to marry me. If ever you change your mind, you'll have to come to me and put your arms around my neck and tell me I was right and you were wrong."

With that he swept out of her house, slamming the door after him, and Hazel, speechless, watched in vain for him to look back before he passed out of sight around the bend. Her world was shattered and she left disconsolate among the fragments.

TIP O'GORMAN sat comfortably near the red-hot stove. The wind and the snow were blustering outdoors. It was what the people you yearn to kill call a bracing day in January. Actually the weather was such that the well-known brass monkey would have been frost-bitten in at least one ear.

"It's a good old world." Tip sighed luxuriously and wiggled the toes of his roomy slippers.

Entered then one who changed the pleasing aspect of the good old world.

Judge Driver slammed the door behind him and untied the comforter that tied the hat to his head. He removed the hat and buffalo coat, hung both on pegs behind the door, sat down and glared at Tip O'Gorman.

"You've done it now," exclaimed Judge Driver.

"What particular thing have you on your mind?" Tip queried equably.

"The sheriff you were so set on having elected! Oh, yes, says you, put in an honest man. Give the dear people a bone to chew on. And we took your advice and gave 'em their bone. And now look at the damn thing."

"What's happened to the sheriff?"

"Not a thing. I wish something would. It's what's happening to us that bothers me. Your fine li'l love of a sheriff is appointing his own deputies."

"The law gives him that privilege."

"You don't understand. I had picked two deputies for him to appoint—good safe men. You know that part was left to me, and I fixed on Johnson and Kenealy. This morning I mentioned their names to the new sheriff. 'I thank you kindly for your good intentions,' says Bill, or words to that effect, 'but I have already decided to appoint Shotgun Shillman and Riley Tyler.' "

"What?"

"I'd say what! I'd say hell, I would! Ain't it nice, ain't it funny, ain't it a pretty state of affairs? And what are you going to do about it?"

"Has he appointed 'em yet?"

"They're sworn in by now. He said he was expecting 'em any minute when I left."

"Shillman's the nearest," said Tip, glancing out of the partly frosted window-pane, "and he lives forty miles away. I wouldn't count on those boys being appointed to-day. The storm may have kept 'em away."

"No such luck," growled the judge. "They're appointed all right enough."

"Think so if it makes you happy," Tip said with a grin. "You're always such a pessimist."

"Here!" snarled the judge. "Don't you try to ride me, Tip. Say right out what you mean."

"I did," smiled Tip. "However——"

"Huh," snorted the judge, and put his feet on the table and began to pull at his lower lip.

"Shotgun Shillman and Riley Tyler," murmured Tip musingly. "Hum-m-m!"

"Can't you think of anything to do but buzz like a bee?" demanded the irritated judge.

"There's lots of things you can learn from bees," protested Tip O'Gorman. "Maybe they do buzz some, but they gather lots of honey."

"We'll gather lots of honey, won't we?" snapped the other. "Both Shotgun and Riley are absolutely honest."

"And sharp—infernal sharp. Don't forget that."

"You take it easy."

"Spilt milk. We've overlooked a bet, that's all."

"Oh, that's all, is it? I tell you it won't be all. I've got a hunch."

"Don't be superstitious. Politics is no place to play hunches."

"Apparently it isn't even a place to play common sense," said the judge. "If it hadn't been for you and your advice we wouldn't be in this fix. You got us in. Now you get us out."

"You make me sick, Tom. You're getting to be a regular old granny. I tell you there is no rat in the hole. Suppose Bill does appoint two honest deputies. There is still Bill, isn't there? What are two deputies going to do against Bill's orders? And Bill will do what I tell him. Oh, yes, he will. You needn't shake your head. I can manage Bill Wingo."

"I wish I could be sure of that," worried the judge.

"You can be, old-timer, you can be. I'll manage Bill as per invoice, so you just bed your mind down and give it a rest. The bottle's in that cupboard, water's in the kettle, sugar's on the table, lemons in that box. Help yourself, make punch and be happy. Make enough for two while you're about it. Your punch always did taste better than mine. I never could mix one to taste anything like. Lord knows how you do it. It's a gift. I hear you had a long run of luck at Crafty's last night."

Et cetera, words without end and amen. Tip O'Gorman was a skilful scoundrel. He knew precisely how far to go and he rarely employed a shovel. For even the dullest have a wit flash now and then.

He soon had the jurist purring.

To Billy Wingo that evening came Tip O'Gorman; a bluff, hearty, good-hearted Tip; a Tip that told funny stories and was a good listener himself and laughed at the right place. You've heard it all before doubtless, and know the method: "A chair for Mr. Dugan. He owns the stockyards. His pockets are full of greenbacks. Let him win as much as he can and don't forget to tell Patsy to be waiting for him at the corner with the lead pipe when he goes out."

The old, old game, you see. Shabby, moth-eaten through and through, fairly obvious; but it works—most of the time.

"That's fine whisky, Bill," observed Tip, cupping an affectionate hand round his glass. "No, no, tempt me not, brother. I know when to stop, if I am old and sinful. A pleasant fire, a comfortable room, a hot drink and a cold and winter's night. What more can a man want?"

"What indeed?" said Billy politely. Inwardly he thought: "What the devil does he want?"

You will perceive that the game was not running true to form. For it to be successful, the victim must not become a prey to low suspicion.

"Sworn in your deputies yet?" Tip made casual inquiry.

"Not yet. Storm might have kept 'em away."

Then all was not lost. Tip began to feel a mental glow. He had been counting on the storm.

"Have you appointed 'em?" he put the dread question.

"Sure thing."

"Who are they?"

"Shotgun Shillman and Riley Tyler."

"Oh, yes. Good men, both of 'em, but——"

Tip O'Gorman fell silent. He toyed with his glass.

Billy Wingo regarded him slantwise. That "but." "Yes?"

"But," continued Tip O'Gorman, "I know of better men."

"Yeah?" Rising inflection and a cocked eyebrow.

"Yeah."

"For instance?"

"Johnson and Kenealy."

"Why Johnson and Kenealy? Why not Shillman and Riley?"

"Shillman and Riley never have done anything for the party. Johnson and Kenealy have."

"What have Johnson and Kenealy done for the party?"

"For one thing, they have always voted right."

"That is one thing, but not a large thing. Other men have voted right too—frequently. Some too frequently; if you know what I mean."

"Politics, my dear fellow, is not child's play. We do what we must to win. But it doesn't pay to look a gift-horse in the mouth too closely. He may bite." Tip O'Gorman stared at the new sheriff.

The latter smiled a long slow smile. "There are muzzles," said Bill Wingo.

Tip dismissed this with a wave of his hand. "Too big a horse and too many teeth," said he.

"Ah!" murmured Billy Wingo.

"Come, come, Bill, you're no fool. You know what I'm after. You know what you owe the party. Johnson and Kenealy must be taken care of."

"Must," observed Billy, "is the hardest word in the dictionary."

"Sometimes it means the most," declared Tip O'Gorman. "This is one of those times."

"Ah!"

There it was again, that irritating monosyllable. For the first time Tip O'Gorman began to experience a doubt.

"We expect you to appoint Johnson and Kenealy," he said bluntly.

"And if I don't?"

"Oh, you will—after you've thought it over."

"I thought it over after Judge Driver came to me. And I decided not to. I prefer my own men."

"Johnson and Kenealy will be your own men."

"That is a question." Billy sat back in his chair and made a church roof and a steeple with the fingers of his two hands. He raised lazy gray eyes to Tip's face. "That is a question," he repeated. "They may be my men and then again—" He ceased speaking, leaving the sentence unfinished. The church steeple became a gallows. "You see, I can't risk it," drawled Billy.

Tip O'Gorman carefully set his glass down on the table. "You must," he remarked softly.

"As I said before," murmured Billy, his drawl drawlier than ever, "must is a hard, hard word. But I'll tell you what I'll do, Tip," he continued in a louder, more cheerful tone. "You show me what 'musts' in the statutes apply to the sheriff's office and I'll obey every last one of 'em. When I took office, I made oath to obey and support the laws, you know."

He smiled at Tip. The latter smiled back. "Lookit here, Bill," he said in his best and most fatherly fashion, "I like you——"

"I suppose that was why I was elected," interrupted Billy.

"Partly," was the brazen reply. "But there were other reasons, of course. We needed a good man to win, a man that was on the level, an honest man, a——"

"Not a crooked man, or a dishonest man, or a pink man, or even a man with purple spots. So you elected me. I'll take it as a compliment. Go on."

"A straight man doesn't throw down his friends," said Tip O'Gorman.

"Sure not," declared Billy warmly. "He'd be a pup if he did. I agree with you, Tip. We won't fight over that."

"You're throwing us down," insisted Tip.

"Now, we're getting down to carpet-tacks," said Billy. "But who are 'us'?"

"The party."

"The party?"

"The party."

"But the party and my friends are not necessarily the same thing."

"We elected you."

"That doesn't make you my friends. Understand me, Tip, there are a lot of folks in the party I like and admire—a lot of 'em. But the folks I like and admire don't come to me and give me orders, and my friends don't either. Not that you've been giving me any orders, Tip. You wouldn't do such a thing."

"It's all right to ride me," said Tip, without losing for a minute his amiable smile, "but you might better leave off the spurs."

"I ain't riding anything to-day," averred Billy. "There's the bowl. Dip you out another glassful."

Tip O'Gorman did not accept the invitation. "I wish I could make you understand," he said slowly, crossing his legs and clasping both hands round a plump knee.

"This is a serious matter, Bill."

"Sure it is," asserted Billy. "You're serious. I'm serious. He, she or it is serious. Outside of that it's a fine, large evening."

"Lookit here, Bill, what's your game?"

"Game? What game are you talking about?"

"What do you want? What are you after anyway?"

Billy made swimming motions with his arms and hands. "Paddle out, paddle out. You're over my head and getting deeper."

"You see, Bill, it's thisaway," said Tip. "Some years the party makes more than other years, and——"

"And the years it makes the most," insisted Bill, "are the years I make the most. Is that it?"

"You get the general idea."

"But not the general idea of what I get," persisted the strangely obtuse sheriff. "What is the minimum I can expect?"

Tip did not relish being pinned down to cases in this fashion. He preferred generalities.

"The minimum?" repeated Tip.

"And the maximum," suggested Bill. "I might as well know all the horrible details."

"From three to five thousand dollars," said Tip, watching his *vis-à-vis* closely.

Said *vis-à-vis* looked disappointed. "Small change," he remarked coldly. "Who gets the other nickel?"

"Your salary is two thousand," Tip told him reproachfully, "and three to five thousand above that makes five to seven thousand. What more do you want?"

"Whatever's right," declared the amazing Mr. Wingo.

"That's right—what I told you."

"What did the last sheriff get?"

"I told you it varied."

"I know you told me. Tell me again."

Tip O'Gorman shifted his position in the chair. He was being baited. He realized it now. A slow anger rose in his breast. But an admixture of dismay in the anger kept it from boiling over.

He continued to temporize. "Your slice will be worth while, well worth while. Leave it to us. You can trust me."

"Can I? I wonder."

"Meaning?" O'Gorman's face was cold as his heart was hot.

"I wonder. I do it now and then. Habit, I suppose. No harm in it, is there?"

"Lookit here, you don't doubt me, do you?"

"Unhand me, Jack Dalton! I may be poor—I may starve to death, but I will never be an old man's plaything. Better death than dishonor-rur-rur. Don't be so melodramatic, Tip. Who am I to doubt you? You? What a question!"

THE fingers with which Billy Wingo then proceeded to make a cigaret were steady and sure in every movement. Billy licked the length of the white roll, smoothed it down and twisted one end. Tip O'Gorman did not know what to make of him. Or rather he thought he knew too well, which frequently amounts to the same thing.

"You'd better trust me," rumbled Tip.

"Be reasonable, Tip. You ask for trust and you give me a stone."

"A stone?"

"What else is three to five thousand bucks, I'd like to know. I'm no child, man, and I've put away childish things, including all-day suckers."

"You must take me for one."

"Not you, not in a million years. But—" Mr. Wingo paused and looked up at the ceiling. His lips moved. He muttered of figures and sums.

Tip O'Gorman awaited his pleasure. What else was there to do?

"I think between nine and ten thousand is nearer the correct amount for li'l me." Billy said at last.

"What?" screeched Tip, fairly jarred off his balance at last.

Billy made his position plain. "Say ten thousand in round numbers."

"Ten thousand devils!"

"Not devils—dollars."

"You're crazy!"

"It's the least you can do," insisted Billy.

Tip O'Gorman made an odd noise in his throat. After making which, a dog would have bitten Mr. Wingo. Tip may have been a bad old man, but he was not a dog. He really dissembled his foamingly murderous rage very well indeed.

"I'll have to see the rest of the boys," said Tip O'Gorman, and he actually smiled.

"Why no," contradicted Billy. "You won't. Why whould you? Rafe and you are the dogs with the brass collars in Crocker County, and you wear more brass than Rafe, when you come right down to it. What you say usually goes without question."

"I never paid ten thousand for a sheriff before," protested Tip.

"There's nothing like establishing a precedent. Don't be hidebound. This is the newer generation, an advanced age, you know; one that's advanced by jumps if you could only be brought to realize it."

Tip held up an arresting hand. "Don't joke," he said. "I realize what the blessed age is doing, but doubling the ante this way is more than a jump—it's a mighty wild leap."

"It can be done," Billy said placidly. "What are impossibilities to-day become realities to-morrow. Q. E. D. P. D. Q."

Tip O'Gorman raised plump hands to the level of his ears. "I didn't think when I proposed you for sheriff," he remarked earnestly, "that I was proposing a road-agent too. Oh, you burglar! I do admire a hawg. Yes, sir. But what can a feller do? Ten thousand goes. About those deputies —I don't suppose you'll have any objections, now that you've got what you want, to appointing Johnson and Kenealy?"

"Oh, yes, indeed I have—plenty. No Johnson and no Kenealy. Shillman and Tyler. Yes."

"No. You've got to earn that ten thousand."

"Bribery and corruption, Tip, is a serious crime."

"Bosh! You listen to me, young feller. We're buying you, body, soul and roll with that ten thousand cases! You've got to do as we say. Hell's bells, what do you think you are?"

"A stranger in a strange land. Damn strange, too. Tip, you're an old scoundrel!"

Tip O'Gorman's hand halted half-way to his armpit.

"No, no, Tip, not that," Billy warned him, keeping turned on the other man's stomach the gun that had suddenly appeared from nowhere. "Don't turn rusty in here. The carpet is new and so is the furniture. Go a li'l slow, or a li'l slower, whichever appeals to you."

Tip locked his hands behind his head. "Be sensible, Bill," said he calmly. "You can't hope to buck us, if that's your idea. You can't."

"Can't I? We'll see."

"What can one man do?" contemptuously.

"One-two-three. Three men. Three men can do a lot. Yep. I've seen it done."

"Have you?"

"I have. But I want to be fair to you, Tip. You'll notice I haven't removed your gun. I'll return mine where it came from—behind the waistband of my pants. Now turn your wolf loose."

But Tip O'Gorman merely smiled. "I thank you kindly," said he. "You mean well; but as you say, the carpet and the furniture are new. It would be a pity to spoil both them and the evening."

"You mean we'll go outdoors then?"

"*We* will not, but *I* will. You will stay here and, I hope, enjoy one good night's rest."

"One, huh? Do I hear you say one? I do. I get your meaning, thank you. So good of you. Don't get up. I would a tale unfold. Did you ever hear the story of Benjy and the bear? No? This is it. Benjy was out hunting one day and it happened the bear was out hunting too. For the bear was hungry, and the bear saw Benjy before Benjy saw the bear. And after the dust had cleared away and all, the bear was bulgy and the bulge was Benjy."

"Huh," snorted Tip O'Gorman, "what does that prove?"

"It proves that it's better to be the bear than Benjy. At least that's the way it looks to a man up a tree. I made up my mind some time ago that if I ever got tangled up in a situation like that I'd be the bear and not Benjy."

Tip O'Gorman stared with an odd expression at Billy Wingo. "You *have* changed," he remarked with conviction. "I wonder——"

"Give it a name," begged Billy when Tip failed to complete the sentence.

Mr. O'Gorman shook his bullet-head. "No, I got other fish to fry."

He got up heavily and began to pull on his overcoat.

When he was gone, Billy Wingo crossed the room unhurriedly and barred the door. He threw a quick glance at the blankets nailed across the windows ostensibly to keep out the drafts. All tight. No one could look in.

"All right, boys," he said in a conversational tone. "You can come out now."

The door of an inner room opened. Two men emerged. One was a long, lean citizen with a long, lean face barred by a heavy, grizzled mustache. The other was shorter, of equally lean build, and considerably younger. The older man was Shotgun Shillman, the younger was Riley Tyler.

In Riley's hand was a thin block of paper. A pencil stuck up behind his ear.

"Did you get it all?" queried Billy, sitting down in his chair and hunching it close to the table.

"Most of it," Riley replied. "All the important part, especially where he tried to buy you up. Gee, you've got him now. Send him over the road any time."

"But it's only Tip," said Billy, taking the block of paper from Riley and riffling through the scribbled leaves.

"Arresting him would sure throw a heap scare into the others," Riley grinned.

"And that is what I want to avoid," said Billy. "There's no use in scaring off the flock by downing one bird. We'll just file away Tip O'Gorman's remarks for future reference. We can afford to wait. Where's that Bible? I'll swear you boys in right away."

IT WAS the next day that Arthur Rale, the district attorney, called on the new sheriff. He was a heavy-jowled, heavy-handed, heavy-bodied individual, with black hair, close-set eyes, and, what was curiously at variance with those heavy jowls, a long and pointed nose.

Billy Wingo was expecting the district attorney to pay him a visit. For Shotgun Shillman had been told that Tip O'Gorman, Rafe Tuckleton and Judge Driver had spent the morning closeted with that gentleman.

Billy Wingo was cleaning a Winchester when the district attorney knocked and entered.

"Si'down, Arthur," invited Billy, indicating a chair with the barrel of the rifle.

The district attorney returned the salutation gruffly. Billy smiled sweetly down at the rifle-stock he was hand-rubbing. Mr. Rale stamped his feet, hung up his hat and coat, and sat down heavily in the chair. Resting both fists on his knees he fixed Billy with a hard eye.

"What's this I hear?" he wished to hear.

"I dunno," said truthful William.

"I hear you've appointed Shillman and Tyler deputies," Rale said accusingly.

"Seems to me I *have* done something like that," admitted Billy.

"You've got to cancel their appointments."

"Got to?"

"Got to."

"I must be gettin' deaf," drawled Billy. "Seems like I heard you say got to."

"You heard me right," declared Rale, with a vicious snap of strong, white teeth. "You cancel those appointments and put in Johnson and Kenealy instead."

"Everybody seems to want those two fellers," said Billy, wagging a puzzled head. "I don't understand it."

The district attorney leaned forward. His broad, flat face was venomous in its expression.

"Look here," he said harshly, "you like Hazel Walton, don't you?"

Whang! In that confined space the crash of the gun was deafening. The district attorney, coughing in the smoke, picked up himself and his chair from the ground. He had fallen over backward at the shot, struck the back of his head and now his actions were purely mechanical.

"Dazed you like, didn't it?" Billy queried in a soft voice. "You did hit pretty hard. Luck is with you to-day. I'll bet if you went down to Crafty's you'd bust the bank and Crafty's heart."

Rale did not take the palpable hint. He sat down again and looked uncertainly at Billy Wingo. He had courage, this district attorney, the species of courage, you understand, that to function properly must have a shade the better of the break, that bets always on a sure thing and never on an uncertainty.

Rale had been knocked off his balance mentally and physically. He did the wrong thing.

"You tried to murder me," he blurted out.

Billy shook a solemn head. "You're mistaken. If I'd tried to murder you, I'd have done it. Accidents will happen, though, even to the most careful fellers. Yeah. You were speaking of the Waltons, Arthur. I didn't quite catch what you said."

He gazed expectantly at the district attorney. It seemed to the latter that the barrel of the rifle was in a line with the third button of his vest. Certainly the muzzle looked as large as a mine opening. Was the rifle cocked? Billy Wingo's large hand covered the breech. Billy moved the large hand a trifle. Yes, the rifle was cocked. The district attorney's eyes strayed downward. At Billy's feet was a spent shell.

"Look here," said Rale, "if that shot was an accident, why did you flip in a fresh cartridge?"

"How do you know I worked the lever?" demanded Billy.

"Because the spent shell's on the floor between your feet."

"You've been reading those detective stories again, Arthur. It would look mighty bad for me if you were to pass out in here to-night. You're a big man and a heavy man. And the ground is frozen harder than rock. Bet I'd have to use a pick. I hope, Arthur, you're not thinking of doing anything to make me use a pick."

Billy had uttered these sinister words in a mild and plaintive tone. The expression of his countenance was even milder and more plaintive. The district attorney found it difficult to believe that he had heard aright. Yet he had heard the report of the rifle aright. There could be no mistake about that.

The district attorney sat rigidly erect. He cleared his throat. He wished his heart would stop pounding so hard. Odd, too, that it should seem to have moved out of its usual position to another that was already occupied by his windpipe. Breathing and speaking were rendered difficult. Quite so.

He cleared his throat again. "Wingo," he said, "are you threatening me?"

"Threatening you?" Billy said in a shocked tone. "Certainly not. Wouldn't think of such a thing."

The district attorney tried again. "Wingo, I don't know what to do with you. I——"

"Don't do anything," suggested Billy. "I'd feel better about it, too."

"Huh?"

"Yeah, I would. I've got a new job here, Arthur, and I guess it will keep me busy—busy enough anyway. And how am I going to swing it and do justice to the taxpayers if well-meaning fellers like you are alla time experimentin' with me?"

"Wingo," said the district attorney sternly, "stop this tomfoolery! Instantly! You have played the buffoon long enough."

"All right," smiled Billy. "I'll be good."

"That's better. Much better. Keep to that tone and we'll get along, we'll get along."

Again the district attorney cleared his throat.

"Lord, Lord," thought Billy Wingo, "what a foolish thing this man is!"

The district attorney picked up the thread of his discourse. "We can't have you upsetting our plans in any way, Wingo. We can't have it, and we won't have it. I order you to immediately cancel the appointments of Shillman and Tyler and appoint instead Johnson and Kenealy. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Billy in a weary voice, "I understand. I understand perfectly. You can go now."

"I'll go when I have your answer."

"Your mistake. You're going now."

So saying, Billy arose, lowered the hammer of his rifle to the safety-notch and laid the weapon on the table. Then he raised himself on tiptoe and stretched luxuriously. His arms came down slowly. He turned a surprised gaze upon the district attorney.

"Haven't you started yet?" he said briskly. "Come, come, get agoing."

Even as he spoke he leaped with cat-like agility upon the district attorney where he sat in his chair and wrenched the right arm of that surprised gentleman round behind his back. With his left hand, despite the struggles and protesting roars of the captive, he removed a six-shooter from a shoulder holster and a derringer from a vest pocket.

"You must be scared of some one," observed Billy Wingo, as the derringer followed the six-shooter to a place on the table. "Arise, pushing your stomach ahead of you, and depart in peace."

But the district attorney was averse to departing that way. "You will regret this outrage!" he bellowed, his ripe cheeks and the veins in his neck swollen with passion.

"So will you," said Billy, twisting the man's arm ever so slightly. "You are in a serious position. If you'd only realize it, and be reasonable, we'd all be happier. I don't want to break your arm—unless I have to. Observe, Mr. Man, how easily I could do it."

So saying he pushed the district attorney's arm somewhat farther up his back. The district attorney groaned. Billy eased the pressure. The district attorney began to curse. Billy, boosting him with his knee, assisted him toward the door.

With his left hand Billy withdrew the bar from the staple, opened the door, swung his right foot and kicked the district attorney out into a snow-drift. After him Billy tossed his coat and cap. Then he closed the door and shoved the bar into place.

"And that's that," said Billy Wingo.

"YOU took your own time about coming," grunted Rafe Tuckleton.

Dan Slike crossed his knees and stared at Rafe and Skinny Shindle. "I always take my own time," said he in a voice as blank and expressionless as his ice-blue eyes. "Why hurry?"

"Because you should have hurried," nagged Rafe. "Y'oughta come when I wrote you last summer. This Tom Walton has gone on living all fall and here it is January and he ain't dead yet."

"That's tough," sympathized Mr. Slike and wagged a belying foot.

Skinny Shindle, looking somewhat worried, went to the door, opened it and looked out into the short hall. Satisfied that the breed cook was busy in the kitchen he closed the door and returned to his chair.

"It's worse'n that. Tom ain't the only li'l job I want you to attend to. There's the sheriff, Billy Wingo."

"That will be extra."

"Extra?"

"You haven't any idea I'm gonna do two jobs for the price of one, have you?"

"Well——"

"Well nothin'. I ain't in the business for my health, you can gamble on that. If you're looking for charity, you're roping at the wrong horse."

"No, no, nothing like that," Rafe hastened to say. "I'll do whatever's right and fair. You can trust me."

Dan Slike shook a slow head. An amused twinkle lightened those blank eyes. "Oh, yes," he said. "I'm almost sure I can trust you. Yeah. Almost."

"What do you mean?" blustered Rafe Tuckleton.

"Folks I talk to don't generally need any dictionary," said Slike.

"Huh," grunted Rafe, content to let it go at that. "Anyway, you'll be well paid."

"I didn't come alla way from the Jornada just to hear you say I'd be well paid. Your 'well paid' and my 'well paid' might be two different things. Sometimes you and I don't talk the same language."

Rafe Tuckleton considered a moment. "Five hundred dollars apiece for Tom and the sheriff," said he, looking at Slike from beneath lowered eyebrows.

"We'll bargain for 'em separately," said Slike. "One thousand for Tom payable in advance."

"No," denied Rafe. "Too much."

"Aw right," assented Slike cheerfully. "I'll be pulling my freight for New Mexico to-morrow. What you gonna have for dinner?"

"Let's talk it over. One thousand dollars is a lot of money for a li'l job like rubbing out Tom Walton."

"If it's a li'l job, why don't you attend to it yourself?"

"Oh, I can't. Impossible. Why, man, consider my position."

"Sure, I understand. You'd rather live than have Tom Walton kill you. Don't know that I blame you, Rafe. You always were a sensible jasper."

Slike's eyes dwelt on Rafe's face with tolerant contempt. The red color of Rafe's leathery cheeks was not entirely due to the heat of the cannon-ball stove. No.

"I'm not a gunfighter," disclaimed Rafe quickly. "Never was. That's your job."

"And I am a gunfighter. Always was. And it's my job. And I intend to get my price for my job. One thousand in advance or the deal's off."

"I'm not a rich man," protested Rafe. "I lack ready money. So does Mr. Shindle here. Say five hundred now and the rest in the spring."

"I know how rich you are," said Slike. "And I can make a fair guess how you and Mr. Shindle stand for ready money. You can raise the thousand without too much trouble, I guess. Anyhow it goes."

"You drive a hard bargain."

"A man in my business can't afford to be squeamish." As Slike spoke his eyes narrowed.

"But——"

"No buts. You want Walton killed——"

"Sh-h! Not so loud," cautioned Skinny Shindle. "Removed is a better word than killed anyway."

"Aw, hell," sneered Dan Slike, "you make me sick. I've got no use for a jigger that don't call a cow by its right name. I dunno the first thing about removing. But I'll kill anybody you say. I ain't a bit particular. Not a bit." Here Slike bent on Skinny Shindle the full measure of a most baleful regard.

The strangely squeamish Shindle strove manfully to stare down the other man, but dropped his eyes within the minute. This appeared to please Mr. Slike. He smiled crookedly, and turned his attention to Tuckleton.

"Rafe," said he, "my time is money. I can't stand here higgle-hoggling with you from hell to breakfast. One thousand or you get somebody else to do the job."

"I suppose I'll have to do as you say," Rafe grumbled. "And the same amount for the sheriff."

"Not a-tall," denied Slike. "Not a-tall. Do you think I'm gonna rub out a sheriff for a thousand cases? You must have mush for a brain! Killing a rancher is a short hoss, but a sheriff is another breed of cat. Besides, he's got two deputies, to say nothing of the feelings of the county. Killing this sheriff for you means I gotta leave the county on the jump. Do you think I'm gonna run the risk of being lynched for a measly thousand dollars? If you do, take another think. Take two of 'em! Me, I'll take two thousand for your man."

"Two thousand dollars for simply shooting a sheriff?"

"Again lemme remark that if the business was as simple as you say it is, you'd do it yourself. Two thousand in advance."

"But that's three thousand in all."

"You're a wonder at arithmetic. I make three thousand too."

"But look here, Dan, we——"

"I'm looking," interrupted Slike, "and three thousand dollars is all I can see. You gotta expect to pay for your mistakes, Rafe. If you didn't want to have this sheriff hold office, what did you elect him for? You told me your political outfit was responsible."

"How could we tell he'd turn out this way? We took it for granted he'd do what the party wanted, and the first card out of the box he appoints his own deputies."

"Good men with a gun?"

"Both of 'em," Rafe nodded absently.

"Wingo's no slouch himself," Shindle supplied without thinking.

"And that's the kind of bunch you want me to go up against for a thousand dollars!" exclaimed Dan Slike. "You fellers sure have your nerve!"

Slike teetered his chair back on two legs and laughed loudly but without cheer. Rafe and Skinny found themselves somewhat chilled by the sardonic merriment. They looked one upon the other. Slike caught the look and laughed anew.

"You're a fine pair," he said loudly, "a fine pair. Letting a two-by-four sheriff run you. Ha-ha, it's a joke!"

"You go slow, you hear!" directed Skinny Shindle.

Dan Slike's eyes slid round to survey Skinny. "Me go slow?" he drawled. "Who'll make me? You? Not you or Rafe either. Wanna know why? Because I'm the best man in the room, that's why. Wanna argue the matter?"

Apparently neither Skinny nor Rafe cared to argue. At least they made no audible reply to the challenge.

Dan Slike nodded a satisfied head. "Now that's settled, let's go back to business. About that three thousand—yes or no?"

Skinny looked at Rafe. Rafe looked at Skinny. Skinny shook his head. Rafe nodded his. Dan Slike, missing nothing of the byplay, smiled delightedly. His thin lips curled into a crooked sneer.

"There seems to be a difference of opinion," said Dan Slike. "Give it a name."

"Three thousand is too much," averred Skinny Shindle.

"You'll only have to pay half of it," said Rafe.

"But this payment in advance—I don't like it," objected Skinny Shindle.

Dan Slike's boots came down from the table. They came down with a certain amount of speed, yet curiously enough they made not the slightest noise as soles and heels struck the floor. Dan Slike's chair creaked as his body turned ever so slightly sidewise.

"Shindle," said he softly, "you ain't thinking I wouldn't keep my part of the bargain if I take your money, are you?"

"No, oh no," Skinny reassured him hastily. "Of course you would."

"This being so," pursued Dan Slike, "what's the difference whether you pay me now or later?"

"Why, none," admitted Skinny, finding himself fairly cornered. "None whatever. I—we will pay you what you ask."

"Spoken like a li'l man," fleered Dan Slike, and switched his gaze to Tuckleton's face. "Second the motion, Rafe?"

"On one condition."

"Let's have it."

"You finish both jobs within thirty days."

"No, not thirty days, old-timer, nor yet forty-five. Sixty."

"Thirty."

"Sixty days from to-night and the three thousand dollars, half gold, half bills, in my pocket by noon to-morrow."

"Oh, hell, all right!" Rafe cried, tossing up helpless hands. "Come around here to-morrow noon and get your money."

Dan Slike nodded. "Guess I'll be going, Rafe—No, n'mine dinner, I ain't hungry now."

"IT'S the women make half the trouble in the world," mused young Riley Tyler, who had received the mitten from his girl of the period, the restaurant waitress, and was a misogynist in consequence.

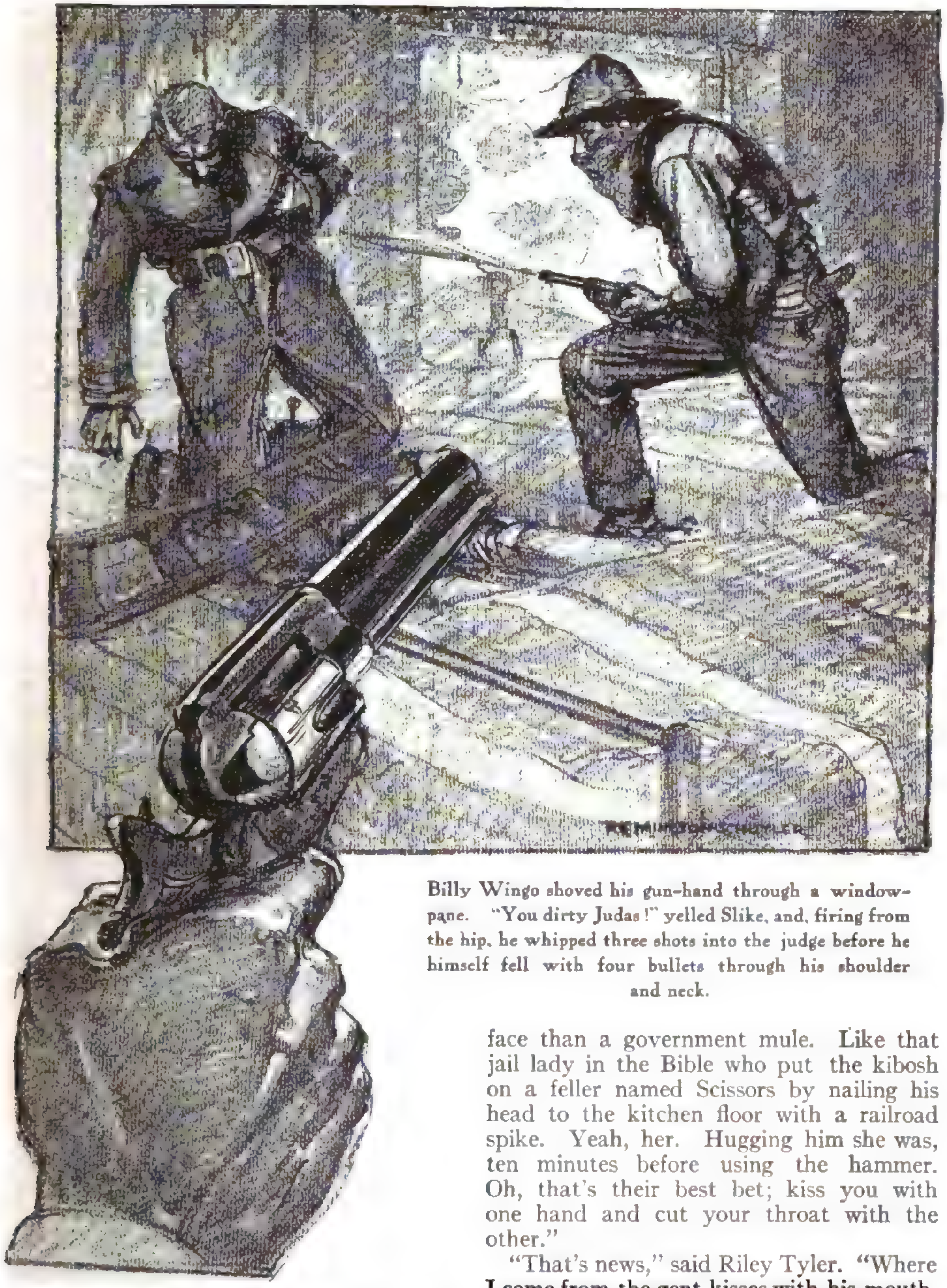
"You're wrong," said Shotgun Shillman. "They make all of it."

"All?"

"All. And not only that—they make all the good, too. Yep, Riley, you can put down a bet there ain't a thing happens to a feller, good, bad or indifferent, that you won't find a woman at the bottom of it. A good man goes to hell or heaven—it depends on the woman."

"That's right, dead right," corroborated young Riley.

"Those fatal blondes!" grinned Shotgun; for the waitress was decidedly of that type.



Billy Wingo shoved his gun-hand through a window-pane. "You dirty Judas!" yelled Slike, and, firing from the hip, he whipped three shots into the judge before he himself fell with four bullets through his shoulder and neck.

"They're all deceivers," muttered Riley Tyler, reddening to his eartips.

"Ain't it the truth!" said Shotgun Shillman. "They can lie to you with a straighter face than a government mule. Like that jail lady in the Bible who put the kibosh on a feller named Scissors by nailing his head to the kitchen floor with a railroad spike. Yeah, her. Hugging him she was, ten minutes before using the hammer. Oh, that's their best bet; kiss you with one hand and cut your throat with the other."

"That's news," said Riley Tyler. "Where I come from the gent kisses with his mouth, and if he has to cut your throat he uses the butcher-knife."

"Did that hasher do all those things?" Shotgun asked instantly.

Riley made believe not to hear. Shotgun chuckled.

"Billy's coming back," observed the latter, gazing through the window. "Where did he go?"

"Walton's, he said."

"I thought he liked Hazel Walton."

"He likes 'em all." Thus Riley, thinking of the scornful waitress who did not like him. "'Lo, Bill, remember to wipe your feet on the mat. Li'l paddies all cold?"

"She's athawing," replied Billy Wingo, kicking the snow from his boots. "But I need a large, long, hot drink alla same. Where is that bottle?"

When the bottle and the three glasses had been returned to their appointed place between the horse liniment and the spare handcuffs, Riley moved listlessly to the front window and drummed on the pane.

"Oh, the devil," Riley groaned. "Here's work for li'l boys. As if there wasn't enough to do in summer."

"Good thing to-day's a chinook," remarked Shillman, without interest.

Billy joined Riley at the window. "Look's like Simon Reelfoot. It's Simon's horse, anyway. It is Simon. I can see his long nose."

Riley squinted at the approaching man. "I wonder what he wants."

"I thought maybe I'd ask him when he comes in," said Billy.

"I would," observed Riley. "That'll show you're interested in your job. It'll please Simon, too. He'll think you've got his interests at heart. After that shall I kick him out, or will you let Shotgun bite him?"

For Simon Reelfoot was not well thought of by the more decent portion of the community. Men that put money out at high interest and are careless of their neighbors' property usually aren't. It was said of him that he still had the first nickel that he ever earned. Certainly he was not a generous person. Three women, at one time and another, had been unlucky enough to marry him. Each wife died within two years of her marriage—murdered by her husband. Not in such a way, however, that the law could take its proper course and hang Simon by the neck till he was dead. The murders were done in a perfectly legal manner and all aboveboard—overwork and undernourishment. The two in conjunction will kill anything that lives and breathes. So Simon, if not a murderer, was at least an accomplice before and after the fact. A cheerful creature, indeed. There were no children.

Something of all that Simon was and stood for passed through Billy Wingo's mind as he stood with Riley at the window.

"He always keeps his horses in good condition," said Billy.

"He does—the skunk!" acquiesced Riley.

"Stop calling a honest citizen names," directed Shotgun Shillman. "Mr. Reelfoot is an upright man. I don't believe he'd rob a child or steal the pennies off a dead baby's eyes. I don't believe he would—if any one was looking."

Simon Reelfoot rode up, tied his horse on the lee of the building—he was always tender of his stock—and entered.

"Howdy," he said glumly. "Cold day."

"If you'd wear something besides that relic of the days of '61 you wouldn't find it such a cold day," observed the straightforward Shotgun.

At which allusion to his ratty old blue army overcoat Simon's upper lip lifted. It might almost be said that he snarled silently.

"Feller as poor as I am can't afford to buy buffalo coats," he declared in the grumbling rumble so oddly at variance with his build. For he was a little clean-shaven man, this Simon Reelfoot, with a hatchet face and the watery peering eyes of the habitual drunkard.

"Yeah," he grumbled, staring from one to another of the three officers with open disapproval. "I ain't got money to buy buffalo coats. I have to work to earn my living, I do. I ain't got time to sit on my hunkers around a hot stove come-day-go-day a-taking the county's money for doing nothin'."

"Which will be just about all from you, Reelfoot," Billy Wingo suggested sharply.

"Oh, you can't scare me," said Simon, shaking a lowering and dogged head. "I say what I think, and if folks don't like it they know what they can do."

"Of course, Reelfoot," pursued Billy with his most pleasant smile, "folks naturally know what they can do. But you don't guess now it gives a feller any pleasure to squash every spider, caterpillar, hoptoad or snail he runs across. And— But I don't know that I ever saw any snails in this part of the county. Suppose now we hold it down to spiders, caterpillars and hoptoads. Yeah. Why kill 'em? Yeah again. Why put the kibosh on you, Mr. Reelfoot, just because you make me think of a hoptoad? You may be a bad old man. I dunno that I care. But I don't like your company. Not a bit. You're a slimy old devil, and you never wash. Therefore let's hear what your business is so you can take it away with you in a hurry."

So saying, Billy sat down, cocked his feet up on the table and regarded Reelfoot gravely. Shillman and Tyler stood before the fireplace, their legs spread, their hands in their pockets and their faces expressionless.

Simon Reelfoot's upper lip lifted in the same soundless snarl.

"I'll go when I please," he began, "and——"

"You're mistaken," contradicted Billy, taking out his watch and holding it open in the palm of his hand. "Not to give it too coarse a name, you'll go when I please. Yep. If you haven't begun to state your official business with the sheriff within forty-five seconds, out you go, Mr. Reelfoot, out you go."

"You fellers are paid to see that the law is obeyed," growled Simon Reelfoot. "You can't throw me out."

"'Round and round the mulberry bush,'" quoted Billy Wingo. "Reverse. Try the other way for a change. You're getting dizzy."

"You make me sick, you fellers. Talk! Talk! Talk! That's all you do. Talk alla time. All right, I will see if you're able to do anything besides talk. Two of my cows have been shot and there's two or three strangers baching it in that old shack of Cayler's on Mule Creek. Cows are worth thirty dollars per right now and I want you to find out if them fellers beefed my cattle."

"Been over there yourself?"

"Shore I have. They wouldn't lemme get inside the door. Threw down on me. Bad actors, them two lads."

"I thought you said there were three," said Billy Wingo.

"Two or three." Snappily.

"Suspicions shore don't count for much," said Billy. "You know that, Reelfoot. Have you any evidence against these men?"

"Sure I have," was the reply. "The bodies of my two cows and a plain track of blood and moccasins to within a mile of the cabin."

"Did the trail stop there—within a mile?"

"Feller had a horse tied. He packed on the beef and rode himself. I trailed the horse to the corral back of the cabin."

"Were you alone?"

"My friend Jack Faber was with me. He can back up everything I say."

"And you mean to tell me, Reelfoot, that you trailed this beef to the Cayler cabin and then allowed the men inside to get the drop on you and run you off?"

"They threw down first," Reelfoot insisted sullenly. "They got the drop. What could we do?"

"I don't know," replied Billy Wingo dryly. "I wasn't there."

"Perhaps," put in the irrepressible Riley Tyler, "the parties of the second part forgot their guns."

"A gun ain't much good when the other feller's got the drop," Simon said sourly.

"The trick is," observed Billy, his manner that of one stating a newly discovered fact, "the trick is, Reelfoot, to get the drop first."

Reelfoot gaped at him. Then his jaws closed with a click. But they reopened immediately in violent speech. "What about my cows?" he squalled. "What you gonna do about them cattle?"

"We can't unscramble any eggs for you, Reelfoot, not being magicians, but maybe we can dump the rustlers for you. How will you have them—shot or half shot? Now, son, you shut up, close your trap, swallow your tongue or something. Riley Tyler is the only one allowed to swear around me. Where do you want to cool off—in here or out in a snow-drift?"

Simon Reelfoot subsided into a chair. He produced a plug of tobacco from one capacious boot-leg, a clasp-knife from the other, snicked open the clasp-knife and haggled off a generous chew.

Billy nodded approvingly. "That's better. Shotgun and I will be with you in two minutes."

Simon Reelfoot glared out of the window. Billy Wingo, whose eyes, for all their casualness, had not strayed from Simon for a minute, had not overlooked the pucker of worry that had appeared between Simon's chin and straggly eyebrows at the mention of the two minutes. With folk like Simon it is always well to proceed with caution, to learn the real reason, not the apparent one at the bottom of every move. Quite so. Why was Simon worried?

Simon's gaze returned from the world without. It skimmed across Billy Wingo, dodged around both Shillman and Tyler, and dropped to the floor where it fastened upon and clung to the nobbly tips of the Reelfoot boots.

"I don't guess there's any tearing rush," he mumbled.

Strangely enough or rather naturally enough, Billy experienced no surprise at the remark. "No, hurry, huh?" he observed. "A minute ago you were in a hot sweat to have us do something right away quick. And now you ain't. What has changed you, Mr. Reelfoot? I ask to know."

"I want the job done right," was the lame explanation. "If you hustle off too sudden, you might forget something."

"What do you think we're liable to forget?" queried Billy.

"How do I know what? But I know it don't pay to go off half-cocked."

Again Simon Reelfoot's eyes strayed to the window. When the eyes swiveled back to meet those of Billy Wingo, the pucker of worry had been wiped from Reelfoot's eyebrows.

"No," he resumed in a tone that was unmistakably relieved, "it don't pay to go off half-cocked."

"No, it don't," concurred Billy, wondering greatly, both at the change in Simon's expression and the relief in his tone. Why? He desired to know why. And he made up his mind to know why. For among his other vices, Simon was friendly with Rafe Tuckleton and his precious gang.

Billy Wingo, shoving cartridges through the loading-gate of a Winchester, slouched casually past the window through which Simon was looking. He perceived, kicking his way through the snow, Mr. Tom Driver, the local Justice of the Peace. There was no one else in sight.

"Lordy, how the snow dazzles your eyes," remarked Billy, stepping back and squinting. "Is that Tom Driver coming here?"

"Where?" inquired Simon Reelfoot, and looked through the wrong window. Yet when Simon had glanced through the other window a moment before, he must have seen the judge. Hum-m-m! Billy Wingo continued thoughtfully to shove cartridges through the loading-gate.

Entered the judge. "Good morning, gentlemen!" was the judicial greeting. The judicial eyes absorbed the sheriff's preparations. "You're not going anywhere, are you, Bill?" he inquired, hooking a chair up to the table and sitting down after he had hung up his hat and coat behind the door.

"Reelfoot's had two cows shot," explained Billy. "He thinks he knows who did it. Shotgun and I are going to see about it."

"Only two cows," said the judge. "Then your presence isn't absolutely necessary. You can send Riley Tyler instead. I have a little business to go over with you, Bill—a county matter. And——"

"Is it important?"

"I think it is."

"All right. I'll stay. Riley, I guess you'd better go with Shotgun."

It was pure chance that enabled Billy to catch the gleam of satisfaction in Reelfoot's eyes. He had just happened to be looking at the man. Satisfaction, yes. Why? Why was Simon glad that he, Billy Wingo, was not going with him on the trail of the beef-killers?

When Shotgun and Riley were gone away with Reelfoot, Billy looked across at the judge and nodded.

"Fly at it," said he.

Without haste the judge fished some papers from his pocket and opened them on the table. He did it awkwardly. His fingers might have been all thumbs. He seemed to have difficulty in finding the paper he wanted.

Billy Wingo, his eyes drowsy-looking, watched silently. "What's it all about?" he asked curiously.

"Jake Kilroe," replied Judge Driver. "He's been selling liquor to the Indians."

"He always has."

"I know he has. And it's a disgrace to the community. It's got to stop."

Billy stared at the judge even more curiously. For this high and moral tone he did not understand at all. It was not like the judge. It was not in the least like the judge. No, not at all.

"Stopping liquor-selling to the war-whoops is none of my job," pointed out Billy Wingo. "The man you want to see is Henry Black, the United States marshal at Hillsville. Besides, what have you got to do with it anyway? You're not a Federal judge."

"But the Federal authorities have ordered me to cooperate with them," the judge said smoothly.

"Which one asked you?" probed Billy Wingo.

"The second deputy."

"Slim Chalmers, huh? When did you see Slim Chalmers?"

"Day before yesterday."

"Here?"

"No, over at Hillsville."

"I didn't know you'd been out of town," Billy Wingo burrowed along.

"Just got back this morning."

"No trouble getting through?"

"Not a bit. This chinook has thawed the drifts."

"Did you go by stage?"

"No, I rode."

The judge wàs answering these apparently most unnecessary questions without a quiver or trace of annoyance. Billy made another cast.

"Did you ride your gray horse?"

"No, the black."

"I hope you wore a coat." The gravity of Billy's tone could not have been bettered.

"An overcoat?" smiled Judge Driver. "Naturally."

"That's good, that's good. I like to see you looking after your health thisaway. You'd be a valuable citizen to lose, judge. I dunno what we'd do without you."

WHAT had gone before had been bad enough in all conscience. But this was even worse. Yet the judge took no offense. He merely smiled blandly upon Billy Wingo and proffered the latter gentleman his cigar-case. Billy declined with thanks. Whereupon the judge drew a long and very black cigar from the case and bit off the end.

"It's funny I didn't meet you in Hillsville," mused Billy, turning his head as if to look at the stove but in reality looking at a mirror hanging on the wall beside the stove that showed on its face an excellent reflection of Judge Driver's features.

As he expected, the judge gave him a quick sharp glance, but what he had not expected was the demoniac expression of hatred that flashed across the judge's face as summer lightning flashes across the face of a dark cloud.

Billy Wingo turned a slow head. His eyes met those of the judge squarely. Gone was the expression of hatred. In its place was one of courteous regret—regret that he had been so unfortunate as to miss his friend Sheriff Wingo in Hillsville.

Billy nodded indifferently. "That's all right. I wasn't in Hillsville. My mistake. Sorry."

The judge stared in frowning puzzlement.

It was at this juncture that the door opened and Skinny Shindle entered. He greeted the two men surlily and laid a note on the desk in front of Billy.

"I stopped at Walton's on my way back from Hillsville," said Shindle, "and Tom's niece gimme this. She said I was to be sure and give it to you soon as I could. Seemed worried like, I should say."

"When did she give you the note," Billy inquired casually.

"When I stopped there for a drink. I was only there about five minutes."

"When was that?"

"Oh, round half-past two."

"And you came straight here?"

"Sure I did. You don't think I was gonna stop anywhere a day like this, do you?"

Without another word Shindle pulled his fur cap forward, turned and walked out. He closed the door with a slam that shook the building. Billy Wingo opened the note.

> DEAR BILLY:
> Please come out here as soon as you can. Come to-night without fail. I need you.

It was signed with Hazel Walton's full name.

Billy folded the note carefully. He did not look directly at the judge. He looked at him by way of the mirror. He was not unduly astonished to perceive that the judge was watching him like the proverbial hawk.

Billy unfolded the note, read it again, then refolded it. He started to put it into a vest pocket, thought better of it, balled it into a crumple and tossed it into the cardboard box that served for a waste-paper basket.

He got to his feet, pulled out his watch and glanced at the time.

"Four-thirty-two," he muttered, apparently oblivious of the judge's presence. "I'll have to hurry."

He crossed the room to an open door giving into one of the inner rooms. Passing through the doorway, he pushed the door partly to behind him. Turning sharply to the left he sat down on a cot that creaked. The foot of the cot butted against the jamb on which the door was hung. Billy threw himself sidewise and applied his eye to the crack between the door and the jamb. His feet at the end of the cot were busy the while, gently kicking the wall and ironwork of the cot. Any one hearing the noise would have been reasonably assured that Billy Wingo was employed in God knows what at a distance from the door of at least a cot length. What he might be doing did not matter. The point was to give the judge the impression that he was not close to the doorway.

Evidently the judge was thus impressed. Billy saw him lean forward, pluck the wadded-up note from the waste-basket and dive noiselessly across the room to the stove. Without a sound the judge opened the stove door and dropped the letter on top of the blazing wood. Closing the door as noiselessly as he had opened it, the judge returned to his chair, sat down and crossed one knee over the other. His expression was that of the cat that has just eaten the canary. Billy could almost see him licking his demure chops.

Billy returned to the office. He was carrying a box of cartridges and an extra six-shooter. His regular six-shooter with its holster and belt hung on the wall behind the table.

"About Jake Kilroe now," said Billy, sitting down at the table and snicking open the box of cartridges, "about Jake Kilroe—what does the marshal want me to do?"

"Get evidence against him," was the smooth reply. "Enough to convict him, of course."

"Of course. Not enough to convict him would help us very little. Yeah. Any suggestions, judge?"

"What kind of suggestions?" the judge inquired with just a trace of impatience.

"How I'm to start in—what do you guess? I don't know much about Jake, y'understand. For instance, where does Jake get his liquor in the first place?"

"How should I know?"

"I dunno. Thought maybe you might. Judges are supposed to know a lot. But if you don't, you don't, that's all."

Judge Driver sat up a trifle straighter in his chair. He looked at Billy with some suspicion. It could not be humanly possible that Billy was joking with him, yet——

"I guess I'd better start in this afternoon," continued Billy briskly. "There's nothing like a quick start. And the marshal would like it too. Suppose you and I, judge, go down to Jake's and see what we can see."

"I thought you were going somewhere else," demurred Judge Driver.

"What makes you think so?"

"That note— You said you had to go some place in a hurry."

"Did I? Well, I am. I'm going down to Jake Kilroe's, and you're going with me, huh?"

"Look here," said the judge, the light of desperation in his eyes, "you don't have to go down to Kilroe's now. That can wait. The marshal ain't in such a fright of a hurry as all that. Go on and do whatever you have to do. I didn't mean—I don't want this to interfere with your personal business, and I'm sure the marshal wouldn't. He'll understand. I know he will. You go on and do whatever you have to do, Bill."

"I will," murmured Billy. "I will. Where are you going, Judge?"

"Oh, I guess I'll be drifting along, Bill," smiled the judge, half-turning on his way to the door. "You don't need me any longer."

"Yes, I do too," Billy declared fretfully. "You come on back and set down. I've got something here I want to read you."

Involuntarily the judge's eyes strayed to the waste-basket. He came back and sat down.

On the table between the extra six-shooter that Billy had finished loading and the box of cartridges was a small leather-bound book. Billy picked up this book and turned to the index. He ran his finger down the page till he came to that which he sought.

" 'Morality, rules of, where consonant

with those of law,'" he read aloud, and turned back to page twenty-eight.

Judge Driver stared at Billy Wingo in some amazement. What on earth was the sheriff driving at. Rules of morality? Well!

"This book," said Billy, glancing across at the judge, "is a copy of the Grounds and Maxims of the English laws, by William Noy, of Lincoln's Inn, attorney general, and a member of the Privy Council to King Charles the First."

"What in God's name," demanded the now thoroughly amazed judge, "has that to do with me?"

"I want to read you something," persisted Billy. "You know that our laws were practically taken from the English laws. Our grounds and maxims are the same as theirs. What's good law with them is good law with us, and *vice versa*. You're a judge. You know that as well as I do. Don't you?"

The judge nodded. "I suppose so."

"It says here," resumed Billy Wingo, "in section thirty-three under Moral Rules, that the 'law favoreth works of charity, right and truth, and abhorreth fraud, covin, and incertainties which obscure the truth; contrarieties, delays, unnecessary circumstances, and such like. Deceit and fraud should be remedied on all occasions.' How about it? Don't you agree with Mr. William Noy?"

"He's right; but there's nothing new about it. I knew it already."

"Then you'll understand me, perhaps, when I tell you that I intend to get to the bottom of everything that has gone on here this afternoon."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that there has been more 'fraud, covin, and incertainties which obscure the truth' scattered round in this room to-day than by right there should have been. I don't mind a little. Human beings are odd numbers anyway. You've got to take all that into consideration."

"I don't understand you."

"Then too," pursued the unheeding Billy, "'contrarieties, delays, unnecessary circumstances, and such like,' I despise. They give me a bad taste in my mouth. Don't they you?"

"They would any one," acquiesced the judge, and made to rise. "Well, now you've read me what you wanted to, I won't keep you any longer. I know you must be in a hurry to get away. We'll let the Kilroe business wait over a few days."

"Sit down, Judge," Billy Wingo murmured softly, his hand resting as if by chance on the butt of the six-shooter lying on the table. "Sit down, do."

The judge hesitated. Then with the well-known hollow laugh, he sat down. He looked at Billy Wingo. The latter looked at him in silence for a space.

"Judge," he remarked suddenly, "deceit and fraud should be remedied on all occasions. Tell me why you put that letter in the fire?"

The judge continued to sit perfectly still. It might be said that he was frozen to his chair. Then slowly, almost imperceptibly, his right hand began to steal upward under the tail of his coat.

"I wouldn't, Judge," continued Billy. "I just wouldn't if I were you."

The judge's hand hung straight by his side. "You're getting in pretty deep, Bill," he observed with a cold smile.

"But not as deep as you are already," said Billy Wingo with an even colder smile. "You haven't answered my question yet—about the burning of the letter. Why, Judge, why?"

"Give it any name you like," replied the jurist carelessly. "I don't feel like answering any more questions."

"Yet a li'l while back you didn't mind answering any questions I felt like asking. Was it to gain time, Judge—to gain time till Skinny Shindle came in and did his part with the note from Miss Walton? Was it, Judge, was it? Dumb, huh? Aw right, perhaps you'd rather tell me why Simon Reelfoot acted about the same way, except Simon was special careful to make us mad besides—mad when it wasn't necessary to make us mad if Simon was playing a straight game, but necessary enough if Simon wanted to gain more time. Yeah, Simon sure beat around the bush time and again before he came to the point. I expect you were delayed getting here, huh, Judge? Simon kept looking out of the window alla time, I remember."

Billy Wingo fell silent and contemplated the judge. The latter stared back, his face impassive.

"Be advised," said the judge suddenly.

"You can't buck us alone. You should know that."

"I should—maybe," returned Billy Wingo. "But I feel like taking a gamble with you. So instead of going to Kilroe's we'll do what the letter said and go out to Walton's to-day."

The judge lifted his eyebrows. "We?"

"We," confirmed Billy calmly. "You're going with me."

"No," said the judge.

"Yes," insisted Billy Wingo. "And what's more, I'll lend you a suit of my clothes and my white hat and my red-and-white pinto. Which there ain't another paint pony colored like mine in this county; and just to make it a fair deal, I'll wear your buffalo coat and your fur cap and I'll ride one of your horses—that long-legged gray, I guess, will be all right."

The judge's face wore a curiously mottled pallor that gave it the hue of a dead fish's belly. "Are you insane?" he gasped.

"Not me," denied Billy Wingo. "It's like I said. I'm gambling with you. I guess we understand each other, Judge. Ain't it luck, you and I being about of a size? Dressed up in my clothes with that white hat and all you'd have to excuse anybody for mistaking you for me. Ca-a-areful, Judge, careful. Don't do anything we would be sorry for. And don't take it so to heart; perhaps he'll miss you."

For a space he considered the judge, then he said:

"I guess we're ready for Riley, now."

Despite his professional calm the judge almost bounced out of his chair. "Riley! Where——"

"In the kitchen with the door open," explained Billy. "He didn't go with Shotgun and Reelfoot a-tall—that is, not far. Only round the house to the back door. Reelfoot wasn't completely successful in separating me from my deputies. You didn't catch me whispering in Riley's ear while he was getting ready, did you? I thought maybe you wouldn't. Your back was turned. Moral: Never turn your back when there's a mirror behind you. Riley, you'd better come in now."

Whereupon there was a noise of boot heels, and Riley entered and smiled cheerfully upon the discomfited judge.

"Howdy, your Honor," said Riley Tyler.

The judge made no acknowledgment of the greeting. He continued to gaze before him with a set and stony face.

"Riley," said Billy Wingo, without, however, removing his eyes from the judge, "I guess we'll need another witness. I wonder if you could get hold of Guerilla Melody."

Riley nodded and went out.

"And that's that," said Billy Wingo, smiling.

The judge's hands gripped the arms of the chair. "You know that the man Melody is an enemy of mine," he said in a shaken voice.

"I know that he is an honest man," returned Billy Wingo.

"I won't go," the judge declared feebly.

"You said that before," said Billy Wingo, in no wise moved. "You'll go all right. Yes, indeedy. Do you wanna know why? I'll tell you. You see, Judge, I know what I'm up against. I know that the only barrier that stands between me and the graveyard is the lead in this gun. I like life. I enjoy it. Besides, I'm too young to die and too sinful and all that. Therefore it's my business to see I ain't cut off in the flower of my youth, *et cetera*. You're considerably older than me, Judge, considerably. The gray is in your hair like frost on a punkin, and the devil has drawn two mighty mean lines down from your nose to the corners of your mouth, and the crows have messed up your eye-corners too, for that matter, and may the Lord have mercy on your soul, you miserable sinner, because I won't—if you don't do exactly what I tell you to do. It's my life or yours, and it's not gonna be mine."

"Baby-talk," said the judge, but there was no conviction in his tone.

"You think so? Aw right, let it go at that. Here's the rest of the baby-talk: The first false move you start to make between now and the time I'm through with you, you get it."

"You wouldn't dare!"

"Wouldn't I? Call me and see. No trouble to show goods."

The judge hesitated. It was obvious that he was of two minds. He chose the safer course—for the present.

"There is a law in this county—" he began.

Billy Wingo leaned forward, his chin jutting out. His eyes were unpleasantly cold. They matched his voice when he spoke.

"Don't talk to me of the law," he said. "It's you and your friends that have made the law in Crocker county a spectacle for decent men. Law! You've dragged the statutes in the mud till you can't tell 'em apart from the turnips underground. Law! You've prostituted your office for a little filthy money here, there and everywhere till it's a wonder you're able to live with yourself. How do you do it? Don't you ever get tired of your own stink, you polecat?"

This was too much. The judge was, after all, a human being. He had his pride, such as it was, and courage of a kind. He threw himself sidewise, and at the same time his right hand flipped up under his coattail—flipped up and flipped out.

There was a flash and a roar and a spirt of smoke. The judge's six-shooter was wrenched from his fingers and sent spinning across the room. The judge remained upon the floor. There was no feeling in his right hand. But his right arm felt as if it had been struck with a spike-maul.

The acrid smoke rose slowly toward the ceiling.

"You can get up, judge," Billy Wingo said calmly.

The judge rose slowly and collapsed into the chair he had so abruptly vacated. He held his right hand before his face and waggled it. Stupidly he looked at it. The flesh of the trigger-finger was slightly torn. It bled a little.

"The bullet didn't touch you," said Billy. "The trigger-guard did that when the gun was twiddled out of your hand. The lead hit the frame in front of the cylinder. Wait, I'll show you. He crossed the room to where the judge's six-shooter lay, picked it up and brought it to the judge for his inspection.

"See how I trust you," said Billy sardonically, holding up the judge's six-shooter within ten inches of the judge's eyes. "You could almost grab this gun out of my hand if you felt like it. I really dunno but what I hope you'll feel like it."

But the judge did not feel like it. He perceived without difficulty the gray splotch on the frame of the six-shooter that marked the spot where Billy Wingo's lead had struck and he felt absolutely no inclination to gamble further with fate. Not he. No!

Billy tucked the judge's six-shooter into his waistband and ran a hand over and under the jurist's outer clothing.

"You might be carrying a derringer or something," he murmured in apology.

But he found no other weapon, and he returned to his seat to await the arrival of Riley Tyler and Guerilla Melody.

GUERILLA MELODY regarded the judge without expression. "Huh," he grunted. "Huh."

The judge did not look at him. He had cheated Melody in a cattle deal the previous year, and had since found himself unable to look Melody in the eye. Some villains are like that. They are usually of the cheaper variety.

"It's good and dark now," observed Billy Wingo, "and the moon will rise in another hour. We don't want it to be too high when we strike the Walton ranch. Why the smile, judge? Oh, I know. You think we'll be seen by one of your friends when we're leaving and he'll get to the ranch ahead of us. I doubt it, judge. You know we ain't going by way of Main Street. No, we're going out back of the corral. The cottonwoods grow right up close to the back of the corral, and if we lead our horses and hug the posts there ain't much chance of anybody seeing us. No. Come along, Judge, lessee how my clothes fit you."

Within the quarter-hour they rode out of a belt of cottonwoods into the Hillsville trail, three wooden-faced men and the wretched judge. The latter rode in front with head bowed on hunched shoulders.

Where the snow permitted they trotted, but most of the time they were forced to walk their horses. Four times before they reached the draw leading to the Walton ranch they floundered through drifts that powdered the horse's shoulders.

At the mouth of the draw the trail to Walton's was clotted with the tracks of a few ridden horses.

"I guess," remarked Billy Wingo, "that Skinny Shindle came this way all right when he brought that note from Walton's."

The judge shivered, but not with cold. He was very miserable and looked it.

The moon lifted an inquiring face over the rim of the neighboring ridge and threw their shadows, thin and long, across the green-white snow.

"We turn here toward Walton's, Judge," suggested Billy, when the jurist continued to ride straight ahead.

The judge pulled up.

"I'm not going to Walton's!" he cried aloud. "I'm not going, I tell you! You can't make me! You can't."

His voice broke at the last word. He threw his arms aloft in a wild gesture. The features of the face he turned toward Billy were contorted with emotion. He gibbered and mowed at them in the moonlight. He looked like an inmate of Bedlam. He was certainly in a bad way, was Judge Driver.

Suddenly he lost his head. He clapped heels to his horse's flanks in an effort to escape. But both Billy Wingo and Riley Tyler had been waiting for precisely such a move ever since leaving Golden Bar. Two ropes shot out simultaneously. One fastened on the red-and-white pinto's neck, the other settled round the judge's shoulders. The paint pony stopped abruptly. The judge flew backward from the saddle and hit the snow on the back of his neck.

The three friends dismounted and gathered round the judge. Riley loosened his rope. The judge lay still and gasped and crowed. The wind had been considerably knocked out of him. When he sat up he was promptly sick, very sick. The paroxysm shook him from head to heels.

It was half an hour before he was able to stand on his feet without support. The three boosted him into the saddle, mounted their own horses and proceeded along the draw.

Whenever the judge made as if to check his horse, which he did more than once, Billy Wingo would crowd his horse forward and kick the pinto. Their progress may be said to have been fairly regular.

A mile from the ranch-house they climbed the shelving side of the draw, and rode across the flat to where a straggling growth of pine and spruce made a black pear-shaped blot along the smooth white slope of a saddle-backed hill. The tail of this evergreen plantation ran out across the flat from the base of the hill to the edge of the draw they had just quitted. A tall spruce, towering high above his fellows, formed the tip, as it were, of the stem of the pear.

A hundred yards beyond this spruce, where the draw met lower ground, and lost its identity as a draw, was the Walton ranch-house. On the flat the evergreens barred the four riders from the eyes of any one watching from the house.

The four men reached the trees, rode in among them. Three of them dismounted and tied their horses. The fourth remained in the saddle. Said Billy Wingo to the fourth:

"Get down."

The judge got down. Swiftly his hands were tied behind his back, and his eyes were thoroughly blindfolded with his own silk handkerchief.

"Now, boys," said Billy, lowering his voice, "I guess we know what to do. You, judge, won't have to say anything, but if anybody else thinks he has to say anything, he's got to do it in a whisper, and a skinny whisper at that. Let's go."

As Billy uttered the last low words Guerilla Melody seized the judge's right arm and forced him into motion. With Riley Tyler leading the judge's mount the three men scuffled in among the trees on the back trail.

Billy Wingo stood silently in his tracks until the trio were out of earshot, then he padded to the spruce and halted behind it. He removed his overcoat. From a voluminous pocket he took what appeared to be a roll of cloth. He shook out the roll and discovered the common or garden variety of cotton nightshirt, size fifty.

"If whoever's in the house can pick me out from the snow after I'm wearing this, I'll give his eyes credit," he muttered, pulling on the garment in question over his head.

He buttoned the nightshirt with meticulous care, fished a washed flour sack from a hip pocket, and pulled it over his head. A minute or two later he was joined by Riley Tyler.

"If I didn't know it was you," whispered Riley in a delighted hiss, "I'd be scared out of a year's growth. Those eye-holes are plumb gashly."

"I expect," said Billy grimly. "Get on your outfit. I guess you ain't needed, but we can't afford to take any chances."

Riley Tyler threw off his blanket capote, dragged from an inner pocket a disguise similar to the sheriff's and hurriedly put it on.

"Don't come till you see the signal," cautioned Billy, "and if you hear any shots before I give the signal stay right here where the cover's good and drop anybody you see running away. Y'understand?"

"You bet."

"Judge swallow it all right?"

"Down to the pole. He thinks we're all three with him."

Billy nodded. "Better move along the draw about twenty yards," was his parting order. "You can't see the side the cedars are on from here."

Boldly, without any attempt at concealment, he walked straight to the edge of the draw. Below him barely fifty yards distant were the snow-covered buildings that were the Walton ranch-house, the bunk-house and the blacksmith shop. He could not see the corrals. They lay beyond the thick column of cottonwoods growing beside the little stream that supplied the ranch-house with water.

He half slid, half walked down the side of the draw and headed straight for the ranch-house. He could not see lamplight shining through any of the windows. But there was a faint glow at the farthest of the windows in the side of the house. This window he knew was one of three lighting the front room, a room that ran clear across the house. This side of the house was clear of young trees and bushes. But on the other side of the house, the north side, Hazel had planted young cedars to serve as a windbreak. These cedars grew within a yard of the house.

Without any fear of being discovered, so confident was he that it would be impossible to see him against the white background, he approached the blacksmith shop, slid between it and the empty bunk-house and came to the right-angle end of the kitchen. His gun was out, be it known, but he held it behind his back. He wanted no touch of blackness to mar the hue of his costume.

At the corner of the kitchen he dropped on his knees and one hand. Here behind the windbreak the snow was no more than two or three inches deep, and he crawled along the side of the house toward the faintly glowing window that was his goal, at walking speed.

Crouched beneath the window he laid his ear close to the window-sill and listened. For a space he heard nothing, then feet shuffled across the floor and there was the "chuck" of a log being thrown on the fire. Then the shuffle of feet again.

Silence.

Inch by inch Billy raised a slow head above the window-sill. When his eyes were level with the lower crosspiece of the sash he paused. For a long time he could see nothing within the room but the fire in the ruddy jaws of the fireplace with its attendant pile of logs, and a big chair over which had been thrown a buffalo robe. Then after a time he saw beyond the chair the boot soles of a man lying on the floor. The body of the man lay in the shadow cast by the big chair.

There was something about those boot soles that told Billy that the man was dead.

"I figured it would be this way," Billy told himself. "I didn't see how else it could be. Damn their souls! They don't stop at anything!"

He continued to stare unblinkingly into the room and after a time he made out the dim lines of another man's figure sitting on the table beside one of the front windows. The head of this other man was turned away from Billy. He was watching the draw through the front window. But there was no life in the draw—yet.

Billy waited. He continued to wait. His feet began to get cold. They gradually grew numb. The hand that held the six-shooter began to have a fellow-feeling, or lack of it rather, with the feet. He changed hands and stuffed the chilled hand under his nightshirt into his armpit. A cramp seized his left knee. He straightened it gingerly and ironed out the cramp with the back of his gun-hand.

The cold crept up both legs. When it reached his middle, a cramp fell hammer-and-tongs upon his right knee, calf and sole of his foot. He straightened that leg and dealt with it like a brother.

S-s-suschloop! A section of snow several yards square slid off the roof and avalanched upon him. At the sound the figure at the window turned as if shot. Billy, by a supreme effort of will, stifled the impulse to dodge and held his body motionless. He was covered with snow. Snow was down the back of his neck as well as on the window-sill in front of his mouth. To all intents and purposes and to any eye he was a pile of snow fallen from the roof.

Swiftly the figure on the table walked across the room to Billy's window and looked out. Billy remained with considerably less movement than the proverbial mouse. The snow, while it covered his head, did not completely conceal his forehead and eyes. But Billy reckoned on the reflection of the firelight on the window-pane to blind somewhat the man within. For a few seconds the man stood looking out the window over Billy's head. The pile of snow he gave but the most passing of glances.

But to the frozen nucleus of the snow-pile it seemed that the few seconds were hours and that the snow-pile was subjected to the most searching scrutiny.

The man returned to his post on the table by the front window, and Billy breathed again. He had been unable to distinguish the man's features. The light from the fire was not strong enough.

After another century of waiting Billy perceived that the fire was again burning low. There was a small spurt of sparks as the remnant of the log fell apart. The man slipped from the table and strode across the room to the pile of logs and sticks beside the fireplace.

This was the moment for which Billy Wingo had been waiting. He scrambled on hands and knees to the front corner of the ranch-house. Whipping a box of matches from a hip pocket, he lit one in a cupped hand.

He let the match burn his fingers before flipping it down. He stood at gaze, straining his eyes down the draw toward the Hillsville trail. Even as he looked a dark object detached itself from some bushes several hundred yards distant and moved toward the house.

Billy returned to his post at the window. Slowly he raised his head to the level of the lower crosspiece of the sash. When his eyes again became accustomed to the darkness of the room he saw that the man was no longer near the fireplace. He was standing at the front window staring down the trail.

On account of the soft snow Billy did not hear the approaching horse until it had almost reached the ranch-house door. When the horse stopped the man inside the ranch-house moved quietly to the door and stood at one side of it. His hand moved to his leg and came away.

The rider dismounted. Billy heard him rattle the latch of the door.

"Don't shoot!" he heard him say in an agonized whisper. "Don't shoot, for Gawd's sake!"

Billy, watching at the window, saw the man in the room fling open the door. For an instant the tall and hatless form of Judge Driver showed black against the expanse of snow framed in the doorway. Again came that plea for mercy—a whisper no longer, but a wild cry of "Don't shoot! Don't shoot! It's me! Driver!" as the judge, realizing only too well that any such outcry was tantamount to a confession of guilt, plunged into the room. Obviously his purpose was to escape the fire of the avenging rifles that he had every reason to believe were somewhere in the brush along the draw. He was acting precisely as Billy had reckoned he would act, and there was not the slightest danger of Billy or any of his men shooting him. But a very real danger lay behind the ranch-house door. The judge's only chance lay in convincing the man behind the door in time.

He convinced him. The man yanked him roughly into the room and slammed the door shut.

"Thank Gawd! Thank Gawd!" babbled the judge, sinking back against the door. "I thought you'd shoot me!"

"I damn near did," remarked the man, whose voice Billy now recognized as that of a late arrival in town, named Slike. "If you hadn't jerked your hat off so's I could see your face, I would have. When will Wingo get here, and didja get him to come by himself all right? Huh? Why don't you answer? Whatsa matter? Isn't he coming or what? By Gawd, *you're wearing his clothes!* Where is he?"

"He's here!" gurgled the judge.

"Where?" Slike's voice was a terrible snarl.

"Here—up on the flat."

Slike promptly seized the judge by the throat. "Then you led him here. What are you trying to do—double-cross me?"

"No, no!" gulped the judge, pulling at the other's wrists. "I couldn't help it! He forced me to come!"

"Then you did lead him here, damn your soul! You white-livered cur, do you think I'm gonna hang on your account? What did you tell him? Answer me, damn you!"

To the accompaniment of a string of most ferocious oaths, Slike shook the judge as the terrier shakes the rat. The judge fought back as best he could. But he was no match for this man of violence. Tiring at last, Slike flung him on the floor and kicked him.

"I'd oughta stomp you to death!" he squalled. "What did you tell him?"

"Nothing! Nothing!" cried the judge. "He must have guessed it!"

Dan Slike laughed. It was a laugh to make you flinch away. The hair at the base of Billy Wingo's neck lifted like the hackles of a fighting dog.

"Guessed it!" yelped Slike. "Guessed it! Aw right, let it go at that. How far away is he?"

But the judge had his cue by now. "He's two or three miles back," he said faintly. "If you start now you can get away."

"You know damn well there's too much snow," snapped Slike. "How many's he got with him?"

"One—two."

Slike kicked the judge in the short ribs. "How many? Tell the truth!"

"Tut-two."

"Three in all, huh? and you and me are two—say one man and a half anyway. Two to one call it. What's fairer than that I'd like to know? We'll finish it out in the smoke right now."

"What?" There was considerably more than pained incredulity in the judge's tone.

"We'll shoot it out with 'em here, I said. I ain't kicked all the fighting blood out of you, have I? If I have, I can soon kick it in again. Here, come alive, you lousy pup! Get the gun off that feller I downed. It's on his leg yet. His Winchester is over there in the corner. It's loaded and there's two boxes of cartridges on that shelf. Bring 'em all over here. Then you take that window and I'll take this one. We'll give 'em the surprise of their young lives. Get a wiggle on you, Judge. You've got a brush ahead of you. Fight? You can gamble you'll fight! It's you or them, remember!"

"Suppose he comes bustin' in the back way," quavered the judge, perceiving that he had indeed fallen between two stools.

"We'll try to take care of him. But he'll come the other way I guess."

But Slike guessed wrong, for Billy Wingo, judging that the psychologial moment had arrived, shoved his gun-hand through a window-pane and shouted "Hands up!"

"You dirty Judas!" yelled Slike and, firing from the hip, he whipped three shots into the judge before he himself fell with four of Billy Wingo's bullets through his shoulder and neck.

Shot through and through Judge Driver dropped in a huddle and died.

Slike, supporting himself on an elbow, mouthed curses at the man who he believed had betrayed him. The murderer's supporting arm slid out from under and he collapsed in a dead faint even as Billy Wingo, with window-glass cascading from his head and shoulders, sprang into the room.

"The Rider of Golden Bar" will be continued in EVERYBODY'S for August.

HAVE you ever been caught in a crisis where you had instantly to determine upon a plan to insure the future welfare of a loved one? This is the situation that confronts McCalman in the story called "Double Indemnity," by Elmer Davis, in the August EVERYBODY'S, on sale July 15.

Photos by White Studio.

Marcia Kallan (Olive Tell) and her lover, *Jovaine* (Pedro de Cordoba). The husband (Emmett Corrigan) enters, but *Jovaine* does not see him.

In *Jovaine's* studio, where *Kallan* sees the bust of *Mrs. Kallan*, which the sculptor has made as an excuse for her visits.

Nemesis

Would You take a Man's Life on Finger-Print Evidence?

By Augustus Thomas

Published by Courtesy of the Author and George M. Cohan, the Producer

According to the police, the finger-print system is invaluable in the detection and identification of criminals and for years the public has looked upon it as being well-nigh infallible. But is it? Augustus Thomas, the playwright, thinks not, and he has written a play called "Nemesis" to prove his point.

The play opens in the library of the *Kallans*, *Ben* and *Marcia*. There has been a dinner party and cards are to follow. This conversation takes place among the women guests:

Mrs. Purdy: Weren't you flabbergasted to see Jovaine [a sculptor] here?

Grace: No, I suggested having him—having him often.

Mrs. Purdy: Why?

Grace: There is a French proverb—"The darkest spot is just under the candle." If Marcia's going to flirt with Jovaine, this is the place to do it, not his studio.

Dr. Herbert Simpson, *a psychiatrist, whom the British Government had sent to France during the war to treat shell-shock victims, enters and is telling about one of his patients—a young aviator who refused to fly—when* **Kallan** *and* **Davis**, *a prosecuting attorney, come in. The latter are discussing a recent trial.*

Davis: Got a verdict in thirty minutes——

Kallan: Just on the finger-prints?

Davis: Well, principally finger-prints.

Dr. Simpson, *resuming his story about the aviator:* My job in France was nerves, and this boy, one of our best flyers, refused to go up. He said he knew he'd crash. Well, the colonel sent him to me. I saw something was wrong and I said: "This is a very serious business, my lad—refusing"—and to make a long story short, I got the trouble. The boy was engaged to marry a nice girl over in London, but lately in France he'd met another girl and—well, misbehaved a bit—if you understand me. He didn't know that was the trouble, but there it was, in his subconsciousness, like a foreign body. He went to London—told the girl. She forgave him. He came back and flew perfectly.

Grace: Suppose that boy had been a good Catholic and confessed to his priest, wouldn't the relief have been the same?

Simpson: Undoubtedly.

Marcia: Must everybody tell everything?

Simpson: Oh, yes—everybody does somehow—somewhere—*everybody.*

The guests go into another room to play cards. **Marcia**, *taking advantage of being dummy, returns to the library, followed by* **Jovaine**.

Jovaine: Two hours—and this is our first minute alone. You can't call an evening like this a compensation for any half-hour at the studio.

Marcia: I've told you what my friends said about that.

Jovaine: Why tell your friends?

Marcia: If I pretend to call on one of them as an excuse, I've got to take her into my confidence, haven't I?

Jovaine: Kallan likes sculpture. I'll make a study of your head. Two people like you and me can't be what we are to each other and throw it all in the discard because Constance Wendell or Grace Lonarby gets an attack of conscience. Tell me you'll come to-morrow. I must go back now to this pretense. We may not have another moment alone. Tell me——

Marcia: Don't, Louis—some one is leaving the tables every minute.

Jovaine: I can see them from here. Tell me, Marcia. (*He takes her in his arms.* Kallan *enters.* Marcia *sees him, but* Jovaine *does not.*)

Jovaine: Say yes.

Marcia: What is it, Ben—you're hunting?

Kallan: Foster's Bridge.

Kallan *leaves the room quietly without betraying whether or not he had noticed the lover-like attitude of the pair.*

The second act is in *Jovaine's* studio. *Jovaine* talks about the new commission he is trying to get which will take him—them—to Paris.

Jovaine: I know you love me—yes, dear—and we'll be happy there—a few miles from the city. My work while it's daylight—and then real fun—entire relaxation, with people who know how to play refreshingly—and find beauty instead of efficiency and dividends and interest in every object. My God—how I dislike this empty tomato-can culture!

Marcia: If we were only—safe over there.

Jovaine: Ships don't sink because happy lovers sail on them.

Marcia: If we were only safely on board. Louis, I fear Ben knows.

Jovaine: What makes you think he suspects?

Marcia: I'll tell you. Herbert Simpson gave us a book he has written and published on his specialty. There was a chapter in it about stammering on certain words. It said that when there was something in a person's mind—subconsciously—words that in any way betrayed this something, or words that were connected with it, often made the guilty person stammer.

Jovaine: Well, what did you stammer about—my name?

Marcia: No, but last night at dinner, alone with Ben, I tried to say "Studio."

Jovaine: Why talk about the studio?

Marcia: I wasn't. I was talking about a new motion-picture studio on Long Island and I said "st-tu-tudio."

Jovaine: But he isn't claiming that that proves anything, is he?

Marcia: No—he isn't claiming anything—but he has been reading the book. Later, I saw his face suddenly harden and get white—and he breathed— So I thought the best course was to speak before he did.

Jovaine: Of us?

Marcia: I said, "Ben, I've got a surprise for you," and I told him about this. (*The bust that* Jovaine *was making of her.*) And I told him that we wanted him to see it. He's coming today.

That afternoon Kallan *visited the studio.* Jovaine *took the covering off the bust.*

Kallan: It's a portrait, all right. A bit youthful——

Jovaine: In the first mass—a face generally is. Every defining line adds to it.

Kallan: The hair is beautiful. It doesn't seem to be made of any solid substance like clay. It flows as if the wind were moving it.

Jovaine: Well, that's the handling. The secret of doing hair in sculpture is to play—with the material. And clay is the most fascinating stuff in the world. It almost follows a fellow's thought.

Kallan: I see. And yet there is stability enough to retain anything you—you get.

Jovaine: Oh, yes. Every touch.

Jovaine *takes a bit of clay, presses it in his fingers to illustrate his point and then lays it on a table. At an opportune moment* Kallan *takes this piece of clay, puts it in a box and puts the box in his pocket.*

Jovaine *announces that he has won the commission.* Kallan *congratulates him and departs.*

The third act takes place in *Marcia's* boudoir. *Grace* is with her as the curtain rises.

Marcia: We're sailing Saturday.

Grace: Sailing—Saturday?

Marcia: Think of it, Grace dear! Ten

Photos by White Studio.

Kallan murders his wife a few days before she is to sail for France with *Jovaine*.

The murderer, by means of rubber gloves, places *Jovaine's* finger-prints on the nail-file with which the crime was committed and then, with a policeman, "discovers" the body.

days on the boat with the man you love! Who loves you—and not a business creature, tired or otherwise, but an artist—a poet who sees beauty wherever it is—and who is vital and creative and hopeful—and oh, God, young—Youth—and a waistline.

GRACE *leaves and* KALLAN *enters. It is apparent that* MARCIA *had not expected him.*

MARCIA: When did you come?

KALLAN: Just now.

MARCIA: Which way?

KALLAN: The back door.

MARCIA: Why the back door?

KALLAN: I saw Conlon, our patrolman, near the front door and I wanted to avoid him.

MARCIA: Why?

KALLAN: He wants a subscription to the Police Fund and my—I'm economizing. Servants out?

MARCIA: Yes. You said to let them go—that we'd dine out. Have you just come from your office?

KALLAN: No—from Bergman's. I've made a discovery at Bergman's. Jovaine thought clay was a responsive material. Well, rubber—some grades of rubber—are just as sure. That figurine on your desk—that's plaster or bisque. Drop that on the floor and it's gone. I can cast that in rubber just as accurately.

MARCIA: Well, it doesn't thrill me, Ben.

KALLAN: It'll thrill Jovaine. When have you seen him last?

MARCIA: I forget. Four or five days ago.

KALLAN: Do you know his telephone?

MARCIA: Yes.

KALLAN: Call him.

MARCIA: Call him?

KALLAN: Yes—why not?

MARCIA: Why—no reason. But suppose I get him?

KALLAN: See what he's doing, that's all.

MARCIA (*at the telephone*): Gramercy 248 . . . Yes, please. (*To* KALLAN) Do you want to see him about your casting in rubber?

KALLAN: Yes. If he's in, ask him to come up here—before dinner—or afterwards—any time this evening to see you.

MARCIA: One minute, Louis. (*To* KALLAN) Why not say you?

KALLAN: Too much importance about—it. Do as I tell you.

MARCIA: I was thinking—what are you doing this evening? . . . Oh! . . . (*To* KALLAN) He's going out of town. (*Telephoning*) Could you come here a few minutes before that time? Yes—at the house . . . Nothing—nothing—just want to see you a minute. (*To* KALLAN) He'll be here in half an hour. You'll have to listen for the bell.

KALLAN: I released the latch on the lock of the front door before I came up.

MARCIA: Why?

KALLAN: Because the bell's hard to hear. I thought the servants were out, and if we're dressing we can call down.

MARCIA: It's a crazy notion, Ben, wanting to talk rubber castings at this hour.

KALLAN: I don't think so. Jovaine's handling that clay all the time, isn't he? Hardly a day he doesn't leave his thumbprints on it—in twenty—thirty places. Anybody could cast that thumb-print into a rubber stamp, such as old Bergman makes, and put it on a bank vault or on a table—on anything—and all the denial in the world wouldn't acquit Jovaine of a theft.

MARCIA: Well, as sculptors have been modeling in clay—some thousands of them—for some hundreds of years, your idea might wait a little longer.

KALLAN: But Jovaine will be gone.

MARCIA: Gone?

KALLAN: Yes—on his way to France.

MARCIA: How do you know that?

KALLAN: The same way you knew it at first—from his letter to you (*one* MARCIA *had lost*).

MARCIA: I'm not going to be a party to any vulgar row between you and Jovaine.

KALLAN: But you were going to slip away to France with your paramour and leave me in the midst of vulgar pity and vulgar laughter—and this shell of a rotten, empty, vulgar house.

MARCIA: And who do you think *you* are to bully me! If I want to go to France I'll go with anybody. I'm tired of this life.

KALLAN: I had this letter when your guilty conscience made you stutter as your thoughts touched—the boundaries of your treachery. Your portrait in clay, rushed up in three sittings to blind me to months of betrayal, had confession on the face of it. It wore the look of the Marcia that I knew—years ago—the look of the woman that once loved me—the look I have lost and no longer meet—the look he couldn't avoid if he made a likeness of her. My God! In the *dead clay*—speaking across the dead years—its dumb confession. Well—am *I* to be putty in his dirty fingers?

MARCIA: Don't blame him—blame yourself—or if your vanity won't let you do that—blame me. Now—what are you going to do about it.

KALLAN: Do about it——!

MARCIA: Yes—do about it. I'm a woman, not a chattel. You don't own me—and I make my choice. I take nothing you do own. And you'll not bully him, either, about that letter.

KALLAN (*menacing*): What are you going to do?

MARCIA: Don't try violence with me.

KALLAN: Come here! (*He grabs her.*)

MARCIA: Is this what you learn from your stupid books? Let go! I intend to live in the daylight, and not with a gloomy jailer old enough to be——

KALLAN *takes her by the throat, holds her as in a vise, reaches and gets her nail-file (the one from the new manicure set he had given her) and stabs her. She sinks down. He stands with the file in his hand, calm, collected, cold. He takes her handkerchief and wipes the file; looks about the room, but unhunted and unhaunted. He kneels and feels her pulse, then rises. He gets from his vest pocket a rubber thumb-cot and one for his index finger and puts them on. He goes to his overcoat and gets a left-hand glove and puts it on. He takes the nail-file again, regards it as he holds it in his left hand. He draws the thumb-cot across his hair and carefully makes several imprints on the dagger, using the rubber thumb and finger cots. He lays the nail-file by the body, surveys the room, goes and puts thumb-marks on the dresser, on the door, and shuts it carefully. He takes out* MARCIA'S *letter—scans it—places it in the bosom of her dress. His work is done. He removes the thumb-cots; puts on his hat and coat, and leaves.*

On leaving the house KALLAN *greets* OFFICER CONLON *and walks on.* JOVAINE *enters the house.* KALLAN *returns as* JOVAINE *is emerging. The officer hears the conversation.*

KALLAN: Good evening.

JOVAINE: Good evening. I — er — doesn't seem to be anybody at home.

KALLAN: Weren't you inside?

JOVAINE: Yes. I rang but nobody answered.

KALLAN: The bell may be out of order. Were you calling on—Marcia?

JOVAINE: Well, Mrs. Kallan telephoned me she wanted me to step by a moment——

KALLAN: Well, come in.

JOVAINE: I've been up the first stairs and knocked at the door there—but it was locked—and I called—"hello there"—and——

KALLAN: Well, Marcia must be home. There's light in her room. Come in.

JOVAINE: I've hardly time now. I'm catching a train, you see. But I'll telephone her in the morning.

KALLAN *and the policeman find the body. He takes* JOVAINE'S *lost letter from the bosom of her dress, where he had himself previously placed it, and makes a pretense of hiding it.* OFFICER CONLON *takes it away from him.*

THE fourth act begins with the trial of *Jovaine*. A finger-print expert is being cross-examined.

COUNSEL: You don't pretend to have examined or even to have *seen* fifty million finger-prints, do you?

WITNESS: No.

COUNSEL: Then how can you say that any given finger-print would not be duplicated by any one of fifty million other men?

WITNESS: The center of a thumb is a series of lines laid in loops roughly paralleling one another. Each hundredth of an inch of each line has its own individual characteristics, and so has each hundredth of an inch of the open spaces or intervals between the lines. If we take a circle of thumb-print of a half-inch diameter and magnify it to a foot diameter, and then take a wedge-shaped section of that circle, say five degrees at the circumference, and running to a point at the center, we get a diagram of lines and spaces so definite and so individual that no similar diagram on any other thumb out of a thousand is the same. The possible combination of that five-degrees section with the seventy-one other equal sections going to make the circle of three hundred and sixty degrees throws the chance of duplication of our original unit—of which, however, there is no record—into the billions.

JOVAINE *is convicted.*

The last scene is just outside of Sing Sing prison. The witnesses, among them DR.

Everybody's Magazine, July, 1921

SIMPSON, *go in to see* JOVAINE *put to death.* KALLAN *and* DAVIS, *the prosecutor, remain outside. They know when the execution has taken place because the lights have gone dim three times—a weakening of the current for the death-shock.*

KALLAN: Simpson was with Jovaine tonight? The last man, you say?

DAVIS: Yes. Simpson still *insists* the fellow is innocent.

KALLAN: What do you think?

DAVIS: You heard my opinion at the trial? I never had a clearer case.

KALLAN: All circumstantial, however.

DAVIS: Thumb and finger prints are—more than circumstantial—in my mind. They're like a signature.

KALLAN: But signatures are counterfeited often, aren't they?

DAVIS: But not thumb-prints and finger-prints, too.

KALLAN: I've seen finger-prints photographed.

DAVIS: Oh, yes—nearly always.

KALLAN: I've seen them printed in newspapers. Like a block of type.

DAVIS: Oh, yes—regular type.

KALLAN: Well, anything in type can be cast into a rubber stamp, can't it?

DAVIS: Yes—letters and——

KALLAN: Anything. They could take a photograph of your finger-prints and get a rubber stamp of it for 15 cents—overnight—couldn't they?

DAVIS: Yes—but not very likely to occur to anybody.

KALLAN: I don't know. I think it must occur to thousands. Newspapers aren't printed from type—they're cast in a matrix, curved to fit a rotary press. Every newspaper, thousands every morning—thousands of them every afternoon—cast—molded. There must be a hundred thousand men in this country who—cast molds from type.

DAVIS: Yes, if we were talking of counterfeited type, but a man's finger-print——

KALLAN: There are thousands of finger-prints at police headquarters, aren't there—take all the cities.

DAVIS: Yes—photographs.

KALLAN: And electrotypes? Why shouldn't a rubber stamp of a finger-print electrotype occur to any detective—any shrewd detective?

DAVIS: Why should it?

KALLAN: Why shouldn't it, if they wanted to "frame a man," as they say? I'll bet there are poor devils doing time in this prison now on the seemingly infallible evidence of a fifteen-cent rubber stamp.

DAVIS: A rubber stamp wouldn't put the mark just where a man would grip an object—it wouldn't——

KALLAN *takes something from his pocket and offers it to* DAVIS, *who, thinking it is a cigar, refuses it.*

KALLAN: 'Tisn't a cigar.

DAVIS: What is it?

KALLAN: What's it look like?

DAVIS: The finger of a glove—a rubber glove.

KALLAN: Let me take it a moment. (*He strikes a match, burns the glove.*)

DAVIS: Why did you burn it?

KALLAN: That had a man's finger-print on it. I made it to—to satisfy myself it could be done. I didn't suggest my doubts to you because—well, I didn't want you to act on them.

DAVIS: Why do you tell them to me now?

KALLAN: Herbert Simpson says every one tells somewhere—somehow. I didn't care to tell any priest because that wouldn't do as much good—as telling you my doubts. You haven't made any mistake with this fellow. If he didn't take the life of—a woman—he took mine—and he's got what was coming to him—but I don't like to see the intelligence of society the world over kill men—on a fake—that costs—fifteen or twenty cents—and that any shoemaker could furnish.

DAVIS: For God's sake, Kallan——!

KALLAN: It's your own idea, Mr. Davis; I've told you nothing.

DAVIS: Why, you've insinuated— My God, Kallan—if that man was innocent, you've murdered him.

KALLAN: If I did, the Empire State of New York was my accomplice.

(*Curtain.*)

The Moth and the Star

Love, Professional Jealousy and the Resourcefulness of an ambitious Woman figure in this Story of the colorful World behind the Footlights

By Gilbert Frankau

THE principal curse of all artistic endeavor to secure financial success is that the successful artist requires not only an artistic but a business sense. More especially does this principle apply to the least of all the arts—acting. Because from that welter of thwarted ambition, diseased vanities and personal jealousy which is the British stage only the hardest-headed, hardest-hearted ever emerge to London prominence. And, once emerged, your prominent actor or actress must needs devote at least two-thirds of his or her time to the suppression of other hard-headed, hard-hearted mummers—all eager for West End applause and West End money.

The law of our stage, therefore, is the law of the primeval jungle, the law of "big business," the law of all competitive communities: Death (otherwise an ill-paid provincial engagement) to the Weak, the Poor, and Such - as - have - no - influence. Which may or may not be the reason for the decay of British acting in the West End of London.

This fight-to-a-finish struggle, however, is not carried on in the open. Openly, the fighters compliment one another, stroke one another, purr over one another. An illusion of good manners, peculiar to the profession, an illusion of hearty good-will, peculiar to the professional, cloak the snarling, back-biting tussle from all save the astutest eye.

Nevertheless, even in this dark jungle of hatred and jealousy, Love—as a white flower in black swamp-lands—comes occasionally to bloom. Hear now the love-story of Sheila Tremayne; and if the flower be a little less white than your own imaginings, a little stained of petal and calix, be lenient in your appraisement, remembering the soil wherefrom it grew.

MARCIA MEREDITH was a good wife, a mediocre actress, a magnificent business woman, and—above all things—a West End "star." The gaining of that stardom had cost her forty-five years of struggle and most of her soul. To the public she remained a ripe thirty, soulful and temperamental, the shimmering passionate Marcia Meredith of "Love's Victim," "Mrs. Deerson's Marriage," and other dramatic entertainments too trivial for the chronicling. To the sophisticated eyes of "the profession" she stood for the ultimate jungle product—a tigress ready with tongue and tooth and claw to defend her theatrical lair against any who might seek to invade it.

Vague hints of this tigerishness which lurked, always ready to pounce, behind the dark-lashed, dark-green eyes of the leading lady had reached Sheila Tremayne before she accepted the small part of *Doris Gray* in Marcia's new production. But Sheila had only laughed at her informant. The part was a good one, well within her powers; it gave her access for the first time to the West End. Nothing else—not even tigresses—mattered.

And yet, even at the first reading of the play to the company, Sheila had sensed a vague antagonism. Whenever the producer read out a line of *Doris Gray's* it seemed to Sheila, watching the actor-manageress, as though a frown creased Miss Meredith's broad overwhitened forehead, as though the ugly hands twitched, the black hair under the overfeathered hat tossed impatiently.

In after years Sheila Tremayne would have *known* the thoughts behind that overwhitened forehead; would have almost heard the thin lips mutter to themselves: "I oughtn't to have engaged this girl. She's too attractive. She'll make the part too prominent. *I* shall suffer."

For Sheila Tremayne, by instinct, was also of the jungle. She also had it in her to become the star. A psychologist—and Marcia Meredith had needed psychology in *her* fight for stardom—would have told this from Sheila's face, from her hands, from the very artificiality with which she spoke.

A girl's face, was Sheila's. Almost ideal for the footlights. A face essentially virgin, and one that would preserve its illusion of virginity. Stage virginity be it understood; dark-blue-eyed, high-foreheaded under a nimbus of real gold hair, straight-nosed, round-cheeked, small-eared. A face almost devoid of character, except for the full lips and the prominent, resolute chin. It was that chin which first affrighted Marcia Meredith; that and the long-fingered, broad-palmed hands which betokened the needful minimum of art backed by the needful maximum of business drive.

So, for a full week, Miss Meredith called Miss Tremayne "My Dear Child," and instructed author and producer—meek men both, their self-determination rotted by many years of the footlights—to cut as many of *Doris Gray's* lines as might be possible. And at the end of that week, Chance, who plays his part behind the wings, decreed that Lucien Winthrop, the leading boy, should break an arm while mumming for the movies, and brought Basil Harrington in his stead.

Everything that was best in Sheila Tremayne, all the tenderness which could just redeem her acting of "girl" parts from the mediocre, fell crazily to loving Basil Harrington from the first moment her dark-blue eyes visioned him shaking hands with Marcia Meredith. He was the ideal stage-lover, well over six feet tall, with light-brown crinkly hair, nice eyes, the hands and feet of a gentleman and that rarity among stage folk—a voice. Immediately she adored him; and he, in so far as modern young men are capable of adoration, reciprocated. That is to say, he was sufficiently aware of her to turn his head, ever so slightly, from the handshake with Marcia toward the slim tall girl in the russet tailor-made who had just repeated her line:

"But I love him, Mrs. Masterson, I love him. Won't you let him come to me?"

THAT line of *Doris Gray's* is spoken in the third act of Paul Derrick's "great romantic comedy," "Devotion"; of which comedy it is necessary for your understanding to give at least an outline.

Understand, then, that the play, having been written specially to the order of Marcia Meredith, contains only one real part—*Mrs. Masterson.* The entire comedy is a vehicle for the exploitation, reexploitation and superexploitation of *Mrs. Masterson's*—Marcia Meredith's—moods, clothes, figure, voice, gestures, arms, eyebrows, jewelry and "temperament." Around these, and not around any specific dramatic idea, revolve, as pale moonlets around a star, the minor characters.

But in the third and last act of "Devotion" there occurs, doubtless by an oversight of the author, one real dramatic moment. The scene is *Mrs. Masterson's* boudoir. She, by a supereffort of clothes, voice, gestures, eyebrows and temperament, has succeeded in luring *Cyprian Olphert*—Basil Harrington—from his fiancée, *Doris Gray. Doris Gray*, therefore, who, by a stage coincidence is staying with her rival, arraying herself in her most becoming garment, follows *Cyprian* to the boudoir, pleads with *Mrs. Masterson*, and finally triumphs over the entanglement. Thereafter *Mrs. Masterson* makes things up with her own legitimate husband; and the curtain falls and is raised many times to display Marcia Meredith bowing her thanks to a delighted audience.

By the twelfth day of rehearsals, when the last act had begun to shape itself, it became apparent to Marcia Meredith, as it is doubtless apparent to the reader, that a really fine performance of *Doris Gray* by Sheila Tremayne might conceivably involve a considerable amount of publicity, to say nothing of insistent curtain calls, for that young actress. By the fourteenth day, when it became necessary to consider the dresses for the minor characters—Marcia's clothes, needless to say, had been designed weeks since by Monsieur Lépine of Paris, London and New York—the leading lady's cooed "My Dear Child" had been replaced by "Miss Tremayne," a "Miss Tremayne" so perfectly polite as to be absolutely tigrine.

"And how is the frock for the last act, Miss Tremayne?" asked Basil Harrington.

"Oh, not bad," smiled the girl.

They were lunching together, not for the first time, at Gustave's in Soho—a dark little, intimate little restaurant of cheap prices and flamboyant omelettes, not two hundred yards away from the theatre.

"Really nice?" went on the boy in his thrilling voice, "or only so-so?"

"You'll see at the dress rehearsal."

"Can't you describe it to me?" He leaned forward artlessly, and his brown eyes darted admiration at Sheila.

"It's black silk," she admitted. "Quite simple, of course. They can't afford to spend any money on *my* clothes."

"Black!" His intuition caught at the disappointment she was trying to hide from him. "But surely that isn't right for the character. Miss Meredith might wear black. You ought to be in something girlish. Pale pink? Pale blue? And besides—" he hesitated, aware of disloyalty to his employer—"isn't *Doris Gray* supposed to be a millionaire's daughter?"

"She is," snapped Sheila, "but she'll look like—like a charity orphan."

"But why—" began Basil; and in that moment Sheila *knew*.

She had not known before, only surmised vaguely through long lonely evenings in her tiny flat, the influence at work against her. Young to the jungle of stageland, it had needed the mating fervor to sharpen her instincts of self-protection. But now, both mating fervor and defensive instinct were fully aroused.

"Does it matter?" she said.

"*I* think it matters frightfully," retorted the boy. "Not only in the play, but to you. You see, the public nowadays are funny. They insist on our being well dressed. You've no idea what *my* tailor's bill is."

"Men have such an advantage, paying for their own clothes."

"I can't see that. We don't get any bigger salaries for dressing ourselves."

"But you can wear more or less what you like," said Sheila.

Somehow or other—every successful artist knows that there is such a moment—realization of her dual personality was being born in the girl. Self-knowledge added itself to the knowledge of Marcia Meredith. She grew furiously conscious of two Sheilas: the one tender and girlish, who could play *Doris Gray* to the life, who could surrender herself, would surrender herself without question to the adorable boy with the crinkly hair and the clean-shaven lips; the other a hard-headed, hard-hearted unwomanly little person who meant to do battle with tooth and claw for success.

Curiously enough, even the hard-hearted, hard-headed Sheila loved Basil Harrington. "He," she said to herself, "doesn't realize that we are in the jungle. He's too *nice*. I must fight for us both."

"Time we were getting back to rehearsal," suggested the boy, paying his bill. She powdered her nose, pulled down her veil and followed him into the sunshine.

All the two hundred yards down Shaftesbury Avenue, Sheila's new instinct was at work. She said to herself: "It's in my own hands. It's always in our hands, once we're 'on.' The producer can't interfere with me. Miss Meredith can't interfere. Once the curtain goes up on the first night, the issue rests between me and the public. Do the public really care for clothes as much as Basil thinks?"

Entering the stage door, looking in the glass cage to see if there were any letters for either of them, scurrying along the whitewashed passage, down the stone steps on to the half-lit stage, instinct still functioned. Instinct urged: "This is enemy territory. Tread softly. Speak softly. Veil your voice. Veil the purpose in your eyes. Pretend! Pretend! Pretend!"

"BEGINNERS for act three," called the stage-manager; and the "beginners," *Mrs. Masterson's* husband and *Mrs. Masterson's* maid, took up their positions, started in to stumble through their lines.

Sheila found herself a packing-case in the wings, sat down, began to study her part. But her mind was not on the typewritten words; her mind was hovering about the auditorium, empty save for Mr. Peaston, the producer, and the cleaners, sweeping carpets against the evening performance.

"In ten days," thought Sheila, "those stalls, those boxes, that pit, gallery and dress circle, will be full of eyes. And every eye will see *Doris Gray* looking like a charity orphan."

She forced herself to study. "But I love him, Mrs. Masterson. Won't you let him come to me?" And quite suddenly Sheila Tremayne wished that the stage issue between herself and Marcia Meredith had been the real issue. "That," she thought, "would be a fight worth fighting." For this is yet another curse of the acting art, that any one with a due sense of values—and that sense, too, was being born in Sheila—must realize its utter futility.

A shadow blurred the typescript, and, lifting her head, she saw her antagonist.

"Hard at work, Miss Tremayne?" purred Marcia Meredith, regal if a trifle middle-aged in ospreys and sables.

"I'm afraid I'm a terribly slow 'study,'" prevaricated Sheila.

"Then I've good news for you," went on the elder woman. "You know that last speech of yours, the one that begins 'But I love him'? Well, Mr. Peaston and myself have been talking it over, and we both think it too long. It holds up the action. Don't you think so?"

A protest rose to Sheila's lips, was forced down. The speech in question was the climax of her part. To cut it would make *Doris Gray* a colorless nonentity.

"The author agrees with us. So, if *you* don't mind"—as if she'd *dare* mind, thought Marcia—"we're going to take out a few lines of it. If you'll give me your part, I'll show you just where the cuts come."

The actor-manageress took the typescript Sheila proffered; took a gold pencil from her gold bag and carefully excised all but the first two and last three lines of the speech.

"*My* cue," she said, "is not altered."

"No, of course not," murmured the girl; and then, remembering her new self, she smiled. "I think it is a great improvement, Miss Meredith."

"I'm glad you don't mind," said a disarmed Marcia. "Some people are so silly about cuts. As if anything or any of us matters except the play!"

She stood chatting amicably for a moment. She could afford to be amicable now. Sheila Tremayne, in *Doris Gray's* black silk frock, speaking *Doris Gray's* attenuated lines, could hardly cast the shadow of an eclipse on the stardom of *Mrs. Masterson.*

"Oh, and I do hope you didn't think the dress we chose for the last act *too* simple, Miss Tremayne," said the actor-manageress.

"I think it simply adorable, Miss Meredith," cooed the girl, who was learning her jungle laws.

A moment later, with a rustle of charmeuse and a jingle of golden accouterments, Marcia titupped away toward the "prompt" side, there, with Basil Harrington, to await her cue. But all that dreary rehearsal afternoon, and all the dreary rehearsal afternoons which followed, Sheila Tremayne—the tender, girlish Sheila—dried those bitter tears which never rise to the eye; and all that dreary home evening, and all the dreary home evenings which followed, Sheila Tremayne—the hard-hearted, hard-headed Sheila—worked on the full speech as it was before it had been cut to colorlessness, and—totted up her tiny balance in the Post-Office Savings Bank.

"MONSIEUR, there is a young lady to see you."

"What young lady?" Monsieur Lépine of Paris, London and New York lifted a brilliantly brilliantined head, stared, black-eyed, across the ormulu desk of his lavishly furnished private office at the pert secretary who had interrupted his sartorial musings.

"A young lady from the Piccadilly Theatre."

"Her name?"

"Miss Tremayne. Miss Sheila Tremayne."

"I do not know a Miss Tremayne of the Piccadilly Theatre. Of the Piccadilly Theatre I know only Miss Meredith. And of her I know too much. If the Tremayne wants to buy any clothes, let Miss Jameson attend to her."

The secretary hesitated.

"The young lady won't see any one but yourself, monsieur. She says it is about a frock for to-morrow's performance of 'Devotion.'"

"'Devotion'! 'Devotion'! I am tired of 'Devotion.' I am tired of stage people." The dressmaker twirled a black mustache. "The Meredith woman has bothered me enough already."

Nevertheless, after further protest, he consented to leave his office; strode into the showrooms below.

There is nothing "shoppy" about Lépine's London showrooms. The effect, artfully contrived to discourage the economically minded, is midway between that of a drawing-room and a picture-gallery; wall color a pale yellow; chairs upholstered in orange brocade; ceiling black; floor parquet; manikins' stage, which occupies the entire south wall, velvet-curtained and mysterious as a palmist's cave.

Sheila, rising nervously from one of the brocaded chairs, was aware of a tallish foreigner in black cutaway coat, flower at buttonhole, whose eyes seemed to cheapen the inexpensive tailor-made, the inexpensive hat she wore by at least five guineas.

"Mademoiselle Tremayne?" he asked.

"Of the Piccadilly Theatre," smiled Sheila. "I want your help, Monsieur Lépine, I want your advice."

"*Tiens*," retorted the Frenchman. "So you want my advice. That is more than most English actresses want. They are fools, your English actresses. They think they know everything. In Paris, it is different. There, they realize that I, too, am an artist." He altered his tone. "You want some frocks, eh?"

"I only want one frock," stammered Sheila, "and I—I don't know whether I can afford it."

"For the stage?"

"Yes, for to-morrow night. It—" the girl's voice dropped—"it's rather a secret, Monsieur Lépine."

"A secret." The man's eyes twinkled. "I do not make secret frocks." He swished away the secretary, who had been listening intently, and went on: "What part do you take in the play, mademoiselle? The young lady, eh?—I thought so—I remember you, once, at rehearsal, when I came to see Miss Meredith. Why did the management not send you to me at once? Now, we must find a model. There is no time to make. And models are not cheap these days."

Sheila's dark-blue eyes veiled themselves under long lashes. "Supposing the management knew nothing about my coming to you, monsieur. Would that make a difference?"

Said the Frenchman, after a perceptible pause: "Mademoiselle, I, too, am an artist. You spoke of a secret. To me it is no secret. Let me tell you. Miss Meredith is jealous of you; therefore she send you to a cheap dressmaker. Is it not so?"

"Well—" began the girl.

"Do not interrupt. I have not been in this business twenty years for nothing. I know these—how do you call them?—stars. One day, you also will be a star. Then you will do precisely as Miss Meredith." He altered his tone. "This dress—you pay for it yourself?"

"If I can," said Sheila, a little taken aback by the rapidity of the Frenchman's intuition.

"And Miss Meredith, when she find out, what happen to you? What happen to me, Lépine? I tell you: you get the sack—and I, I make no more clothes for Miss Meredith."

"But she needn't know *you* made the dress. I would promise not to tell a soul."

"Foolishness." The dressmaker's hands plunged to trousers pockets. "Foolishness. A Lépine dress is a Lépine dress. All the world recognizes it at sight. I do not need to plaster my name on programs."

"Then you refuse."

"I have not said so. This dress, for which act is it? The last? Miss Meredith wears purple in the last act. And you?"

"I'm supposed to wear black." Sheila's heart was beating furiously. She felt, somehow, that her whole career hung on the next sentence.

"And you do not want to wear black. No. Then you are a little fool. All English actresses are fools. What do you want to wear? Pink? Blue? Foolishness. Wait—I, Lépine, show you the black you should wear." He called across the room. "*Clotilde, Clotilde, faites voire la robe noire que nous avons fait pour*—" he hesitated—"*pour la petite Henriette.*"

Some twenty minutes later, Sheila Tremayne—not the hard-hearted, hard-headed Sheila who had bearded the great dressmaker at half-past ten of an autumn morning, but a tender, girlish creature, frightened almost out of her wits at the risk she ran—faced the lens of a camera in Monsieur Lépine's private studio.

Monsieur Lépine was bawling at her. "Name of a name!" he bawled. "Those hands! Do not clench them. Let the fingers lie lose. So. That is better. And the lips! Half-open. So. Yes. Take her now, Jacques."

The shutter clicked, clicked again.

"And that will be enough," said Monsieur Lépine. He handed Sheila down from the black velvet steps on which she had been posing, and said:

"Now remember. Not a word. You take it off. We put it in a box. It goes home with you. The shoes and the stockings you fetch this evening."

"But the price, monsieur, the price?" stammered Sheila.

The dressmaker bowed. "When you wear it, mademoiselle, the frock is priceless. And remember, for two years we have the exclusivity of your photograph. Also, when you are a star—" he smiled, looking at his handiwork, "but indeed you are a star already—it is I, Lépine, who will dress your plays."

And he added, to himself: "Perhaps, also, I teach the Meredith woman that it does not pay to bother the great Lépine."

TO THE audience, a West End "first night," especially a Marcia Meredith first night, is little more than a society function. The audience knows that Marcia knows the type of play she is sure to have selected. The audience is prepared to applaud, more or less vociferously, for three hours—and read about itself in the papers next morning.

But behind the scenes all first nights are electric with tension. From the author, pallid in the wings, to the least important stage-hand runs a current of nervous anticipation, of longing for the moment the final curtain-call shall signal "success."

Sheila Tremayne, darting — second act over—to the dressing-room she shared with *Mrs. Masterson's* maid, was hardly conscious of Basil Harrington's:

"Going well Miss Tremayne. And you're simply splendid!" She knew only that now, *now*, *NOW*, was the moment. For this moment she had borne with Marcia Meredith through four long weeks; for this moment she had faced Lépine; for this, through an interminable dress rehearsal, she had suffered Mr. Peaston, the producer, suffered the agony of that "simple black frock," of that cut and colorless speech.

She said to herself as she closed the dressing-room door, began to unfasten the "simple" day-dress she had been wearing: "She'll have to wait—she'll have to wait for her cue. I mustn't fluff—or she'll chip in. I *must* be calm. I *must* be calm!"

The tiny dressing-room spun round her. Round and round. She was aware, dimly, of *Mrs. Masterson's* maid, of the dresser tying the black apron round *Mrs. Masterson's* maid's black silk dress. And she thought: "Black silk! The maid wears black silk. I, too, was to wear black silk. So that was Marcia Meredith's idea. The maid and the millionaire's daughter. Both colorless. Both nonentities."

"And that finishes *you*, Miss Arkwright," interrupted the dresser's voice. "Now for Miss Tremayne."

"I think I'll be off, dear," said Miss Arkwright. "The curtain'll be up in five minutes." She nodded excitedly, went out.

By now Sheila was ready for her stockings.

"Bought these yourself, I expect," said the dresser admiringly. "Must have cost a pretty penny. Pity the dress doesn't come up to them."

Sheila's whitened right hand felt in her corsage; came away clutching a piece of paper.

"I'm not going to wear *that* dress, Mrs. Fell. There's a box under my table. You might get it out—" her right hand passed the paper—"and this is for you."

Mrs. Fell took the paper, uncrinkled it—and laughed. "Money is scarce these days," said Mrs. Fell. "Funny they're changing your dress at the last moment; and me knowing nothing about it."

"Nobody knows," murmured Sheila.

The fat, red-faced woman looked up from her dragging-out of the box.

"Nobody? Bless my soul!"

"Nobody—except you. And you're to keep quiet till I'm on. Do you understand?"

Mrs. Fell cut the string of the box and laughed again. " 'Tain't none of my business," said Mrs. Fell, "but the theatre's the theatre. There's rules and there's regulations. There's contracts." She fumbled with the tissue-paper. "I shouldn't do anything to upset folk if I was you, my dear. Not that I won't keep quiet if you wants me to." Then, with a little staccato cry, "Lor', what's this?"

"Oh, that—" to Sheila her own voice sounded like a stranger's—"that's only a black wrap—to wear in the wings. The dress is underneath."

A shrill howl sounded down the corridor—the call-boy's howl.

"Curtain's up. You've got ten minutes yet," said Mrs. Fell.

SHEILA'S brain still spun as she waited in the wings for her cue. She tried to hear the words being spoken on the stage; but her ears, dithered, refused to carry sound. She tried to think of her own words—but the words wouldn't come. Almost it seemed to her as though the cue itself would fail her memory. "And as for *Miss Doris Gray*—as for *Miss Doris Gray*—" That, above all things, she must not miss. Would she hear it? She did not even dare peep sideways through the wings on to the stage.

And then, quite suddenly, her brain ceased spinning; froze to chill unemotional intellect. This was her one chance of success—and of Basil. She must not, dared not, could not fail.

"Cold, Miss Tremayne?" whispered a voice, Miss Arkwright's.

"No." Sheila drew the black wrap which had provoked the whisper closer about her figure. Miss Arkwright tiptoed away.

Now the girl in the black wrap could hear, quite distinctly, every word of the scene on the stage. In three minutes, less than three minutes, she would have to discard the wrap, make her entrance. And Basil, Basil would be "off." She would be alone with the audience—that audience all eyes and shirt-fronts—with the audience and Marcia.

She peeped through the wings, saw Basil, heard his voice. He was making love; stage-love, to *Mrs. Masterson*. Beyond his bent head, she guessed the silent audience; all eyes; tier upon tier of eyes.

"Cyprian—" Marcia's voice—"dear, dear boy."

"Marcia, don't. It isn't fair. It isn't fair to *Doris*."

The fatuous words stung Sheila to quick rage. "That old woman," she thought. "That old woman and my Basil!"

Then Sheila Tremayne disappeared from Sheila Tremayne's mind—and *Doris Gray* took her place—*Doris Gray* tiptoed, still shrouded, to the door through which she must make her entrance; *Doris Gray* listened—real for the moment—to her rival, *Mrs. Masterson*—*Doris Gray* flung aside the wrap that hid Lépine's masterpiece; heard the gasp of a staggered stage-manager behind her, heard the opposite door click to Basil's exit, heard her cue, and trod from gloom to glare without a tremor.

She stood in a blaze of light. She had forgotten the scenery, forgotten Sheila Tremayne. She was *Doris Gray*—facing *Mrs. Masterson*. And *Mrs. Masterson* loathed her. That she could see in *Mrs. Masterson's* dark-green eyes. In those eyes, too, she could see herself—the millionaire's daughter, a tiny shimmering vision of black and silver, gold hair high on white nape.

But Marcia Meredith—who was always Marcia Meredith and never the character she played—saw more than a tiny vision. Into her mind, even as she mouthed her part, came one clear thought. "Lépine! Only Lépine could have designed that black velvet, slashed it to show the silver underskirt." And the audience—Marcia never forgot the presence of her audience—the audience was "eating" both the girl and the frock. Marcia could see, out of the tail of her mental eye, women's glasses focused, women's mouths wide in wonder.

Rage took her by the breasts. How dared this girl, this Tremayne girl, play such a trick! To-morrow—no, not to-morrow, to-night—she should leave the theatre, leave it for good. Yet the scene must be played out to the end. Thank goodness, she had had the foresight to cut that last speech—would they never come to that last speech? Must she, Marcia Meredith, stand there forever, mouthing her foolish lines, knowing herself outwitted, outshone before her own first-night public, in her own theatre?

And now *Doris Gray*, too, grew conscious of her audience—as of a great friendly dog, faithful-eyed and adoring—a great dog that would leap to protect her against all enmity. She knew she could whistle that dog at will, could feel it thrilling at her voice, at her every gesture.

And so those two-painted women between painted walls—played out their comedy.

"But I love him, Mrs. Masterson, I love him." Marcia knew, even from the first inflection of the girl's voice, that the speech would be spoken to its finale; and Sheila, watching those green eyes, knew victory. How those green eyes, those thin lips could hate! And yet, and yet the thin lips were powerless. They dared not speak. She, Sheila Tremayne who was *Doris Gray*—she, *Doris Gray* who was Sheila Tremayne—held that great dog in leash. If those thin lips dared but interrupt, the dog would growl.

"And you won't, you won't keep him away from me any longer, Mrs. Masterson? You wouldn't do anything—anything beastly?"

"Now," she thought, "now, open those thin lips! The game's played out between us——"

And the thin painted lips opened. "Miss Gray, you have taught me a great lesson to-night. Have no fear. Cyprian is yours—and yours alone. Go to him."

SHEILA had made her exit. Behind her, as the "built-in" door clicked, she had heard for the first time that rattle of hand-claps which signifies an audience carried away. The rattle still sounded in her ears; her heart still beat to the triumph of it. And abruptly came reaction, silence in her ears, a coldness at the heart of her. She knew only that now, *now*—as soon as the curtain fell—she must pay for the thing she had done.

Marcia Meredith, that Marcia whose voice carried shrill through the painted canvas, would never forgive. She, Sheila Tremayne, had broken the unwritten customs of the theatre. Next night, and all the nights to follow, the theatre would cast her out. Standing there, in the semi-gloom of the wings, Lépine's masterpiece draping her in shimmers of black and silver, she knew herself disgraced. They were all there, the whole company, twelve of them, waiting for the final curtain-call. But none of them dared speak to her, to Sheila Tremayne. Not even Basil! Basil was whispering to Miss Arkwright. Basil was afraid. She could see the fear in Basil's paint-reddened eyes; she could not see that his fear was all for her. Supposing that her very temerity had lost Basil forever——

"Curtain!" said a voice. "First call." And almost before she realized it, Sheila was on the stage again. They were all on stage in the full glare of the footlights. In front of them, over banked flowers, the house rocked and rang. They could see the applauding hands.

Three times the curtain had risen and fallen—four times—five times. Now, Marcia Meredith and her flowers must have the stage to themselves. Sheila, rushing off, found Basil next to her. His hand caught her arm. "*You* did it," he stammered. "*You* saved the play. That isn't her call. Hark at them!"

"It doesn't matter," said Sheila. "Nothing matters. Let me get away. I want to get away. I don't want her to see me in this frock."

Another hand caught her arm—Mr. Peaston's. Mr. Peaston was screaming in her left ear: "Miss Tremayne! Miss Tremayne! For God's sake go on. Can't you hear them?"

"Hear what?" said Sheila. But even as she asked she heard them, the audience, *her* audience. And the audience was chanting with monotonous reiteration:

"*Doris Gray! Doris Gray! We* want *Doris Gray! We* want to see *Doris Gray!*"

"I daren't," stammered Sheila. "I daren't—Miss Meredith!"

But it was Marcia Meredith herself—Marcia, clutching a great bouquet of the management's flowers—Marcia with a stage-smile on her thin painted lips—Marcia, astutest of business women—who ultimately handed her rival on stage, flung out two whitened arms and *kissed* her before the whole house. For this is the one consolation of all artistic endeavor for financial success: That the public, the great, honest, child-hearted public, is the final judge, the judge whose verdict not even the most powerful dares gainsay.

Which is the only reason why Marcia Meredith has offered her house in Park Lane for the forthcoming marriage of "Miss Sheila Tremayne, whose performance of *Doris Gray* in 'Devotion' has revealed a new delight for London playgoers, and that rising young actor Mr. Basil Harrington. (Photographs of Miss Tremayne, by the Lépine studio, on back page.)"

The Exception

What happens when a blasé Girl who thinks all Men stupidly alike meets another Kind

By Kay Cleaver Strahan

IN THE closet near the foot of the bed the man, his lean body pressed flat against the folds of a satin and fur evening wrap, waited. The illusion dense darkness gives of looking at one's own cheek-curves and nose was trying to nerves that were aching for a cigaret. Night-prowler though he was, his temples were throbbing for sleep; he was insufferably bored.

Again and again during the past hour he had reviewed and refused the advisability of making a dash for it. To frighten the two girls and make an escape would be easy, but despite his mask the cursed length and lankness of him might prove, as it had before, his undoing; and Wilbur City sleeping in peaceful Quaker dignity, old family silver and jewels behind doors which answered to the simplest skeleton key, promised rich rewards to the patient.

"Grandpa Wilbur said to me when he told me he was going to leave me twenty-five thousand dollars for a wedding-present—" it was the arrogant, velvety contralto voice speaking again, and at the mention of the money the man pricked an interested ear—"'Beulah-May, if a man tells you once that your money makes no difference in his love for you, believe him; if he tells you twice, doubt him.' Ronald told me every time we met. Though that isn't why I broke our engagement."

"Why did you break it," coaxed the silky soprano, "it and the others, Beulah-May?"

"Because they were sentimental and stupid. There isn't a man in Wilbur City, I doubt whether there is one in the world, who isn't, the minute a girl says yes, exactly like the man behind him and the man in front of him. Sheep, all of them. They seem to think that if a girl is loved she doesn't need to be interested. They are selfish. They like to play at romance and be jealous, doubtful, in despair one moment and ecstatic the next, but they never give a girl a chance to play at all. They talk about themselves—oh, endlessly! They all say they are unworthy of me, and produce their little packets of naughtinesses as confessions, and are no end proud of them. Their love-words are all the same: dearest, sweetheart, beloved in their tenser moments, darling in their stickier ones, and hon when they are in a hurry. I tell you, Dorothy, they all kiss alike. One would think it was taught in the Wilbur City schools—'Complete Course in Correct Kissing.' "

The man in the closet permitted himself a stealthy grin. He wondered now——

"Do you think," the shiver in Soprano's voice betrayed her own hopes, "that if one of these cave-men types should—should come?"

"I abhor them above all types," replied Contralto, "the I-masterful-male-you-my-woman-my-mate sort; humorless, greedy, intolerable things! Ned Greer went in for it, only he had corns and ingrowing toe-nails, so they spoiled it, rather."

The man in the closet widened his grin and reflected: twenty-five thousand dollars, and she, Contralto, was something of an extra-quality peach. Twenty-five thousand dollars! Men worked for a lifetime and had less in the end.

"Dorothy—" Contralto had lost some of its arrogance.

"Um?"

"Have you met that new man who is working for your father?"

"Adam Nelson? No. Papa brought him out for dinner, but I was away at Helen's wedding. Why?"

"I wondered. Don't you think he is good-looking?"

"I think he is too tall and thin."

"But he seems interesting, different from the Wilbur City men."

"Isn't that funny," ejaculated Soprano, "that you should be interested in him? Because Joe said that Mr. Nelson was asking him about you."

"About me?" Contralto's astonishment was imperfectly feigned.

"He saw you in Gilter's shop. Do you remember?"

"I believe he was in there the day I was getting my silver slippers. What did he ask Joe about me?"

"You know you can never get anything out of a brother; Joe only said that Mr. Nelson had asked him if he knew you. Joe is crazy about Mr. Nelson; he says he is a regular fellow, won't talk at all about his war experiences, and has real pearls for his dress-shirt studs. But why he wants to come and bury himself in a place like Wilbur City when he has such wonderful references from Chicago is more than Joe can see."

"Why," questioned Contralto, "didn't you tell me before about what Joe said?"

"I forgot it. I didn't think you'd be interested, anyway. You never did like blond men."

"Not pretty pinky blonds, but Mr. Nelson is different. His features are strong, and then with that fair hair and those goldy-colored eyes——"

"But," objected Soprano, "he is so tall and thin."

"I like graceful men." Contralto was cross about it.

"I'll tell you," appeased Soprano. "I'll coax mama to let me give a party next week—the house-cleaners will be finished by then—and I'll invite him. Shall I?"

"I could wear my new yellow. Madame Adele thinks it is perfect, but mother insists upon tulle across the back——"

The man in the closet cursed silently, but horribly. Off again on clothes, precisely where they had begun! He knew a girl who wouldn't stay awake all night talking about yellow tulle. A little old red sweater was good enough for her. Ah, but she didn't have twenty-five thousand dollars! If she had——

An hour later a circle of light went slipping over Beulah-May's dressing-table, and rubber-gloved hands scarcely less silent followed it deftly. Then, out through the French windows, a quick slide down one of the Colonial pillars and away to other business through the cloaking blackness of the night.

IN SO far as Beulah-May was concerned Dorothy's party was proving a failure. It was dull of Dorothy to have arranged this childish old matching-quotations plan for selecting supper-partners. The evening was two-thirds over and she and Mr. Nelson had not exchanged a word.

Lucille Young came fluttering up——

"I've drawn Mr. Nelson for supper," she triumphed.

Lucille was always a simple, silly thing!

Beulah-May had helped Dorothy arrange the place-cards on the table for the girls. She remembered with a sting of disappointment that Lucille's and hers had been widely separated. She was standing by a door and as she glanced through it over to the glass doors of the dining-room; they seemed temptingly close. No one was looking; she sped across the hall.

As she came out of the dining-room she met Adam Nelson coming in from the front porch where he had been smoking. He smiled at her. He had an amazing smile; it flashed out, lingered for a moment like a caress and was gone, leaving one to doubt that it ever had been possible on that grave, rather sternly modeled face.

"That was jolly of you," he said.

She was lovely, was Beulah-May Wilbur, lovely always with a witching, contrary dark beauty; but never had she been more lovely than at that moment as she stood there, Wilbur pointed chin high; brown eyes still wistful, doubting their reason for anger; vivid lips held in pouting abeyance, ready to smile or ready to tighten to dignity.

"Changing the place-cards as you did," he explained cheerfully.

The chin went higher.

"I think I do not understand."

"If you tell little lies," he warned, "you won't catch big fish."

The smile stayed longer this time, amused, indulgent, slightly vexed.

Beulah-May fought for an answer, but surprise and anger had tethered her tongue and had set the contents of her brain-pan to bubbling. She turned quickly toward the dining-room.

"Too late," said Adam.

Chattering, laughing couples were coming into the hall. The Harper boy, the fat one, matched his quotation with hers.

At the table Beulah-May ignored Adam with a careful completeness more conspicuous than the most abandoned flirtation could have been. But it brought no salve to her damaged vanity, for Adam, so her guilty ears told her, was going blithely and obliviously on quoting what sounded like Chinese poetry to that simple Lucille Young!

At length, however—

"Oh, yellow tulle," the words came softly over her shoulder, "can you tell me who it was who said that we never hated where we might not love?"

"Usually," she replied, "when I'm at a loss for an authority I use Aristotle. He is quite safe. Though I seldom bother with silly falsehoods. In this case perhaps Wilde would be better, if only you could put it a bit more brilliantly."

"Splendid," he approved, but there was a hint of mockery, of teasing in his voice. "You will forgive me, won't you," he continued, "for calling you 'yellow tulle'? I didn't hear your name distinctly when Miss Arnold introduced us."

It was a staggering situation. Had Dorothy lied to her? Had Joe lied to Dorothy? Had her own intuitions lied?

"I am Beulah-May Wilbur," she answered, placing the Wilburs of Wilbur City definitely with the cleft in the Wilbur chin.

"To be sure," he scorned an elusive memory, "the twenty-five-thousand-dollar girl."

"Fortunately," she gave him, as she turned to the Harper boy, "my friends do not classify me so specifically."

It brought neither the apology nor the explanation she had expected. Indeed, before she had managed a word to Johnny Harper, she heard Adam's voice contentedly picking up the conversation with Lucille.

"Yes," she answered Johnny's question concerning the robbery, "I lost the Wilbur pearls and every trinket I owned. I think Wilbur City should be grateful to me for giving it a chance to say 'I told you so.' Every one in town has always known I'd lose them if I didn't keep them in the vault."

Johnny's mental criticism was that Beulah-May was getting awfully cynical and—what was that French word—*blasé*. Had the well-bred young gentleman known the energetic, primitive emotions that were rioting through Beulah-May's consciousness he would have hoisted his napkin for a flag of truce and fled for safety.

She smiled, and he blinked his eyes and apologized to himself for his momentary mistake. He could not tell that the smile was not for him, that it was a triumphant seal to the pact she was making with herself.

Never before had she planned deliberately a conquest, but, secure in her intuition and fortified by her past unsought successes, she felt no fear of failure. "Wait," she enjoined her rebel emotions, "wait!" And because her mind was thoroughly healthy and because her humor never wholly deserted her, she smiled again at the melodramatic essence of her resolutions—a smile which drew from the Harper boy extravagant and fuddled flattery.

BUT before the first fortnight of waiting was over, Beulah-May discovered that she had no small talent for the weary game she had elected. She had anticipated a brisk affair of dexterous openings and strategic retreats of moves and counter-moves, terminating in a triumphant checkmate called by herself. Her opponent's attitude admitted no game at all; she might fiddle with her pawns as she pleased, he was not playing. When they met he was courteous, with an irritating courtesy somehow suggestive of youth's aloofness for age, but he hinted at no hope of a friendship, nor did he ask to be allowed to call.

That he had no constitutional antipathies to paying calls was evident. He called at the Youngs'; he called at the Arnolds'; and from Dorothy and Lucille, Beulah-May received eulogistic reports which she dared not dispute. Should she say that she considered him a thoroughly detestable person, Wilbur City, she felt sure, would laugh in its sleeve and whisper that at last Beulah-May Wilbur had met her Waterloo.

Had she? The third week had dragged to its Friday before she faced this question. Walking home under the spring-budding maples of Penn Street, a vividly lovely figure in a sports suit of white and deep orange, she forced herself to orient the facts with relation to things as they were instead of things as she had hoped they might be.

"I'm a fool!" she came bitterly to her conclusion. "I am waiting like an idiotic fat woman on the wrong corner for something which will never arrive! I'm a conceited——"

It was unfortunate that at this precise moment of her self-abasement Adam Nelson should have overtaken her and caught step with her. Her heart rose up and thumped in a contracted throat. It was a novel proceeding for Beulah-May's heart and she did not know how to treat with it. She was thankful for the proximity of home. The weather and the movies lasted them until they reached her gate.

"I wonder," he questioned then, "if you'd allow me to come over here and play this evening? I'd like to mighty much."

"Yes," smiled Beulah-May, "do come," and went into the house.

For three weeks she had been planning this moment—a refusal without finality, tinged with sauciness, but not lacking in dignity.

The announcement of a caller that evening was met with real concern by Mr. and Mrs. Wilbur. Their attendance at lodge-meeting was imperative. Mr. Wilbur grumbled that he didn't know a thing about this Nelson, and Mrs. Wilbur wondered what he would think about Beulah-May receiving him alone. As for Beulah-May, she tried not to be grateful to the lodge.

In her room after dinner she sternly denied herself an evening frock. He knew, of course, that Wilbur City did not dress for dinner and he should not have the satisfaction of thinking she had changed for him. And then, ten minutes before the last minute, she arrayed herself in an exquisite blue-and-silvery thing, deceptively demure and dangerously becoming.

"All dressed up," Adam impudently admired as he came into the softly lighted library where Beulah-May had decided to receive him, "and now, after all, I can't stay."

"Can't stay?" she parroted, and caught her lower lip with her sharp little teeth; the words had held such a hopeless, sorry sound.

"Some extra work came up at the office," he explained, and appended, as if with an illuminating inspiration, "I say, can you add? Why not come along with me and help me out?"

"I am sorry—" she began.

"Please," he interrupted, "be jolly instead of sorry and come along. We'll have the walk, anyway, and it is a glorious evening."

In the end her inclination flouted her dignity and her sense of propriety. She got her satin evening wrap, with the fur, and as Adam put it about her shoulders he smiled an odd, contemplative smile which she did not see.

In the office, perched on a high stool, she added dreary column after dreary column of figures, while Adam sat opposite her copying them from ledgers.

"I think," she sugested petulantly at the end of a silent hour, "that Mr. Arnold might get an adding-machine."

"Um-m-m." It was merely an abstracted acknowledgment of the sound of her voice.

Through her long lashes Beulah-May glanced at him. His head was bent over the book and his hair, thick and vigorous-looking, shone brightly golden under the shaded light. Had any girl, she wondered, ever run her fingers through the wave in it? Had those compressed lips, that could smile so alarmingly, ever spoken of love?

Shielded by his concentration on his work she lengthened her stealthy glance into a scrutiny and allowed her imagination to play about the possibilities of this man with his barriers of indifference, of aloofness and mockery removed. Vividly the picture painted itself before her eyes and with its completion came a dismaying consciousness of desire. She contradicted it, denied it, but it persisted.

He looked up, caught her gaze, and the smile came and lingered—

"I wonder," he said, "what you would say if I were to ask you to marry me?"

A sudden divesting shyness overtook her; she dared not give her eyes to his; she dared not trust her voice for a word.

"Forgive me?" he laughed. "Only a queer notion that came to me and I allowed it to escape. Don't you sometimes have odd, direct thoughts, that come and blaze for a moment and are gone?"

"Sometimes," ventured Beulah-May, but her voice trembled. "I think," she finished, "that it is late and that I must go home now."

"I am afraid," he consoled, as he held her wrap for her, "that I disturbed you with my nonsense. Forgive me, won't you, and then forget all about it?"

"No, really," denied Beulah-May, and connected a fatuous "of course," to it.

That seemed to be the best she could manage; what she wished to do was to put her head down on that wide shoulder and cry about everything.

"Good friends, then?" he persisted.

"Good friends," she echoed with a smile that ached.

HIS visits at the Wilbur home, during the month which followed, were so frequent that Mr. Wilbur ceased grumbling about them and accepted them rather as he had accepted war-time bread and the sugar limitations; but, or so it seemed to Beulah-May, Adam overdid that good-friendship idea. Never would he allow himself to be led from the open plains of generalizations into the intriguing paths of personalities. Moon-silvered nights in a canoe on the mill-race were wasted with discussion of Bolshevism. Cozy evenings at home, with the lights glowing dimly rosy and the unnecessary little fire snapping in the grate, were consumed with conversation concerning music and books and plays and pictures.

The effect on Beulah-May's morale was distinctly humiliating. Always complacently aware of her own charms, she now began to doubt and to question them. Other men had considered her beautiful, but this man probably had a different standard of beauty. Other men had considered her desirable, but this man refuted comparisons. She changed her mind about the entire universe with each breath she drew, and occasionally when Adam was looking at her as he was just now she stopped breathing altogether.

"I wonder," he questioned, but his tone saved it from being a repetition, "what you would say if I were to ask you to marry me?"

They were sitting on a bank of the mill-race; over their heads a gibbous moon was doing its best, and was succeeding very well, indeed, in manufacturing magic for the world.

"Because," Adam continued, "I want to ask you, but I am afraid."

"Afraid?" she breathed.

"You are," he went on, "I suppose, the prettiest girl in the world. But my wife must be more than that; she must be true and stanch and sure, you know. Do you think you are, or could be?"

"Adam," replied Beulah-May, "I am. I could be."

"But you have," he demurred, "broken three engagements and the Lord only knows how many hearts."

"I have never," she answered, "loved any man but you."

He kissed her and then, still in his arms, she looked up into his face and waited for those stern lips to speak and say that he loved her and call her his sweetheart, his beloved.

"You," said Adam, "are a funny little fellow, aren't you? And to think that twenty-five thousand dollars go with you!"

"Adam," her voice quivered with the hurt of it, "does the money matter so much to you?"

"Surely it matters. A man can work for a lifetime and have less."

"But," she pleaded, "you'd want me without the money?"

His hesitation was fractional, but she felt it.

"Yes," he assured her, "but Mark Twain said, 'The lack of money is the root of all evil.' It is good to know that we'll be able to avoid the evil."

Mr. Wilbur was too wise to withhold his consent to the engagement, but his grumblings now were continuous, culminating in frequent and fiery eruptions; and Mrs. Wilbur was so busy attempting an assuagement of his fears that she had no time for her own.

"What," she soothed, "if he is a stranger? He has those excellent letters——"

"Any crook in the world," roared Mr. Wilbur, "can produce any letters he needs for any occasion. He may be a crook for all we know; it was shortly after his arrival in town that we were robbed."

"Albert, my dear!"

"All the same," Mr. Wilbur insisted, though shamefacedly, "as soon as I can get away I'm going to Chicago and investigate. I tell you," he thumped the table about it, "something is wrong. Our little girl may think she loves this fellow, but she isn't happy."

Confronted constantly by her father with this assertion, Beulah-May always stoutly denied it and, denying, did not know whether she was speaking the truth or lying blackly. Her emotions had sabotaged the machinery of her mind, rendering it almost useless as an instrument for logical or analytical thinking, but permitting her one conclusion: love had not and would not change Adam.

They had been engaged for more than a month. Spring had welcomed a warmly fragrant summer, but Adam remained largely the Adam of the intolerable, impersonal good-friendship. He retained his barrier of aloofness; if not indifferent he was seldom enthusiastic; he confused sentiment with sentimentality and excluded both from his scheme of things; he regarded the deep seriousness of love with laughter. So, if happiness be defined as contentment, Beulah-May was far from happy.

Her one security she found in the fact that he wished to marry her. His habitual frankness concerning her money did not dispel that safeness because, loving him, she believed in him, trusted him, and forgave him his many delinquencies with a generosity so lavish that it scarcely savored of pardon, but was rather a denial of their existence.

When censure was unavoidable she blamed herself; as this evening when she met him at the door, quiveringly happy and expectant, dressed in a new gown of his favorite color, and he gave her the same greeting he might have given to her mother. "I'm a silly, vain thing," she decided. But that dull ache, to which she was growing accustomed, came about the region of her heart.

In the library, with no warning word, he took a package from his pocket and tossed it into her lap. She opened it. The Wilbur pearls, the wrist-watch and all her pretty trifles strewed out of it.

"Oh-h," she cried delightedly and gathered them into her hands, "where did you find them for me?"

Her eyes held no doubt, no anxiety, and as Adam looked at her, and before he answered, some of the sternness went away from his face—

"Suppose," he said, "that I were to tell you that it was I who took them?"

She attempted a laughing interruption, but he persisted—"Suppose I were to tell you I stood in your closet that night and heard you and Dorothy Arnold talking and that you said——"

Sentence after sentence he flung at her, rather as he had tossed the parcel into her lap; her opinion of the Wilbur City men; her grandfather's advice to her; her expressed interest in himself, with the mention of the meeting in the shoe-shop. Not word for word, but practically complete as to substance he repeated the night's conversation.

Her face whitened, but her eyes came bravely to his:

"If," she said, "I had seen you that night slip from the closet and steal the things, then I'd have known my eyes were useless, lying eyes and I would have poked them out. That's all, dear."

"You—you mean," he fumbled, "that you don't—you wouldn't ask for an explanation, you splendid little silly?" he finished with a certain defiance.

"I don't need an explanation;" her voice was timid, but her eyes were still fearless, "nor want it; only, Adam, can't you ever be kind?"

For an instant he hesitated; his hands hanging at his sides closed and clenched as if they were crushing some helpless thing. Then he strode across the room and sat beside her.

"Beulah-May, sweet," he began, "I am going to be kind now and do the hardest thing I have ever forced myself to do. I have stolen your love, and now perhaps because I am a coward, but I think it is because I love you so dearly, I'm going to try to give it back to you. No, wait. I have to go through with it.

"Three years ago in a 'Y' hut in France I found a Wilbur City paper with your picture in it. I cut it out and put it in my Bible. You see, that was the day I fell in love with you. After that I went about collecting Wilbur City papers. I found two more pictures of you, so I fell in love with you twice again. Three times, so far, and trite as it may sound, I never before had fallen in love, even once, with any other girl.

"That is why I came to Wilbur City as soon as I got into civies. I sort of dislike flourishes, so I thought it would be best for me to come here quietly, get a position, meet you and try to win you. No one asked me whether I was Lindstrome Nelson's son and, though I hadn't planned to make a secret of it, I didn't care to announce it——"

"Lindstrome Nelson?" she gasped. "But you—you were always talking about our needing my money?"

"You demanded originality. But I am getting on too fast. To go back, when I came here and saw you I fell in love with you all over again. And when I heard of your popularity and your broken engagements I was frightened—scared stiff. I wanted to get down on my knees and follow you around, but whenever I'd see you I'd run like a rabbit.

"Then one night I found this burglar-fellow going through my things; caught him red-handed. He begged like a good chap; sick wife, crippled child, and all that. Lies, possibly, but he worked on my sympathies. While he was talking he saw your pictures—I had had them copied and framed—and he offered to tell me 'something of interest about that peach' was the way he put it, and he plunged right in. Clever; put me in his debt, you see, and so on. I was a cad, I suppose, for listening to him, but I can't apologize for it because I know I'd do it again. He had come straight to my place from here, where he'd been smashed into a satin and fur thing in the closet for hours, he said; and he gave me a sniff of the perfume clinging to his coat to prove it.

"He had an amazing memory; he was a first-rate mimic, too, and parts of his recital were, I could swear, phonographically accurate—your bit about cave-men, and young Greer's corns, for instance. There was no possibility of doubting him. In the end I took his loot away from him, led him to the station and shipped him on the early morning train for Detroit where he said his wife was. Your pretties bothered me no end. I wanted to bring them straight to you, but I was too cowardly to run even that slight risk.

"Oh, my dear," he pleaded, "can't you, won't you understand the temptation? I knew your aversions, and could avoid them. I knew your desires, and could work for them. But, as I love you, I didn't see when I began it what a dastardly thing it was to do."

"When you began what?" said Beulah-May.

"Haven't I made it clear? I've been acting all the time. I'm not original. I'm not in the least different from the other fellows—the sheep. I have been wearing wolf's clothes, but I want to do exactly as they have done. I want to call you sweetheart and beloved and, yes, hon when I am in a hurry. I want to talk to you about myself, tell you about my relatives and confess to you the girls I have kissed. If you had doubted me to-night, I might have tried to go on with the acting, but when you stood up so straight and fine and refused to believe that I'd steal even jewels I couldn't go on and steal you and your happiness for life. I'm just an ordinary, ornery dub of a fellow, head over heels foolish in love with his girl——"

"Please," interrupted Beulah - May, "please, then, prove it."

He looked at her and as he looked he knew that the girl beside him, hands extended in a pretty gesture of appeal, was no longer the whimsical butterfly-girl he had thought her. Some time, when he had not been watching, maturity had crept in and claimed her. The brown eyes held a new light of peace and of faith, and the smile, venturing about the curves of her lips, was perfected by the touch of gentleness and the touch of compassion which artists give only to their madonnas.

"Beloved," he began brokenly, "I don't deserve it, I am not worthy of you, but if you mean you will allow me another chance——"

Different? Yes, gloriously, triumphantly and, best of all, eternally different.

Youth was in their wide, wondering eyes; their forms were those of big men, shaped in the open.

Thalassa! Thalassa!

> **". . . Xenophon hastened forward, and presently he heard the soldiers shouting 'Thalassa! Thalassa!—The Sea! The Sea!' and cheering one another on. They began then all to run, and the men embraced one another, and their generals and captains, with tears."—*The Anabasis of Xenophon. Book IV., Chapter VII.***

A LONG train from the West came into the station at Poughkeepsie on a June morning when the sun was just beginning to burn its way through a murky haze, and the air was sodden and heavy with the sticky heat of the Hudson valley on a day of gathering thunder-storms. Down the steps of one of the day coaches nine boys climbed, stiffly, wearily. Their youth was in their wide, wondering eyes; their frames were those of men, big men, shaped in the open. Only one was small, alert, swift in his movements.

On the platform, before the train had come, a young man had been waiting. He was tall; he had long, flail-like arms. He wore clothes—of a sort. Bare feet were thrust into worn tennis shoes; about his ankles flapped trousers that had, probably, once been white. Despite the heat he wore a thin wool sweater; upon it there was that which, in that town, represented license for all the outrage his garb did to decency and good repute—a great block-letter C, in vivid red, standing out against the dingy white of the sweater. For this hot morning had fallen in the month of June, and in that month oarsmen possess the freedom of the city of Poughkeepsie and its environs.

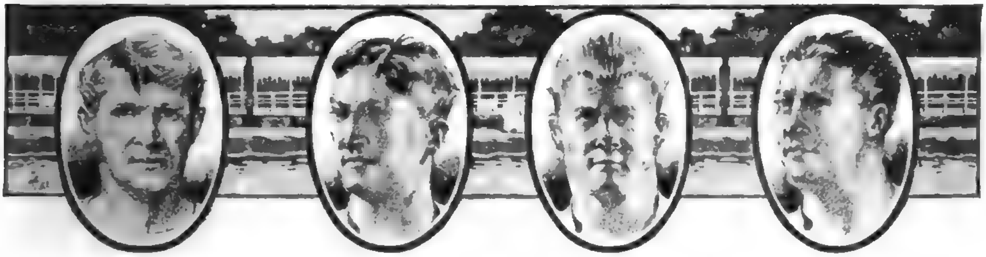
The Cornell man stared at those who descended from the train. There were few passengers, and he looked puzzled. Then he saw the nine from the day coach again: saw them gathered together, with their motley gear of shabby bags and suit-cases, rolled blankets and such things. A look of incredulity came into his eyes. He had been sent to meet the 'varsity crew of Brewster University, which was somewhere—he wasn't sure just where—on the Pacific coast, and had beaten all the crews there, and was coming to Poughkeepsie to represent the West in the great race of the year. And that crew had left Chicago on the train that had just come in.

Reluctantly, incredulously, Harrison—that was the Cornell man's name—started down the platform toward the nine. They couldn't be the ones he was to meet, and yet they must be. There was no other group. But, powers above, had they come East in a day coach? He gave it up; observed that one of the nine had detached himself and was coming forward to meet him. Harrison was tall, but the other was taller, just as he was bigger in every way.

"You from Brewster?" said Harrison, almost hopefully. He wanted to find that he was mistaken. This thing shocked him.

"Sure am. My name's Bradford. You came to meet us? Mighty fine of you, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Harrison—Cornell. Yeh—I've got a couple of launches to take you over. We fixed up your shack a bit; it's not much



The rowing coach never lived who wouldn't have looked enviously at such material in a shell.

By William Almon Wolff

A green, pitifully equipped Rowing Crew from an obscure Pacific-coast College crosses the Continent to meet the Crack Oarsmen of the East. An Inspiring Story of Sheer Grit

Illustrations by H. Fisk

yet, though. And the shell's there, all ready for you. Good trip?"

"Great!" Bradford's eyes shone. "Gee, this is a big country, isn't it?"

Harrison shook his head. It was beyond him. He saw giants looming up about him, big raw-boned youngsters, with tanned faces and huge toil-worn hands. He heard names vaguely as Bradford, committed, it seemed, to forms and ceremonies, performed introductions. Youngstrom—a chap who looked like a viking; Veblen—blue-eyed, blond; Shaughnessy—the little chap, the cox, he supposed; Ladd; Potocki; Nelson; Hunt. But where was their coach? Didn't they have a trainer? Hadn't they brought a cook?

"You've got some stuff from the baggage-car?" he said.

"No." Bradford shook his head. "We traveled light. Just what's here—so we can pack it ourselves. Gee, it's great of you people to lend us that shell!"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Harrison. "We weren't using it, anyway. Hope it suits you. We-ell—let's go——"

Still somewhat dazed, he led the way through the station and down to the river where two launches waited. He might have marked the way those boys looked at the river; the awe that was upon them as they stared up at the steel tracery of the high bridge; the swift tightening of their jaws as they looked across to where the race would end—in two weeks, to the day. But other thoughts preoccupied him.

What crazy enterprise was this, to come to row at Poughkeepsie in the manner of a back-lot baseball team going across town to meet the gas-house gang on its own rock-strewn diamond? To come thus, and encounter crews trained to the last ounce; fed upon scientifically chosen food; drilled, coached, guarded and watched every hour of the twenty-four, protected from all discomfort? It was beyond him! It was not that he lacked admiration for their nerve, their courage. But to undertake a task so hopeless—to start with such a handicap!

He had his job, though, and he could do it. He got them into the launches with their stuff; he saw them across the river, up the river, to a point half a mile below Krum's Elbow. There they could see the shack that for two weeks was to be their home; a ramshackle old wooden structure, much like a barn, save for its windows. There was a float—so low in the water now, at high tide, that it was awash—and a covered shed.

"That shack hasn't been used for three or four years. I guess Wisconsin had it last," said Harrison. "'Fraid you won't be very comfortable in it——"

Those who heard him grinned. Two nights they had been on the road from

Chicago—in day coaches. There had been tourist sleepers before that, with two in a berth. And among them were some who had, in the summer-time, been lumbermen in Oregon and Washington in the great forests; "blanket stiffs," working and sleeping and eating as lumbermen do, for whose comfort not much thought is taken—not much! There was Youngstrom, who, the previous summer, had sailed before the mast on a lumber schooner plying between Seattle and San Diego.

"We'll be living high here, I guess," said Bradford simply.

Then they were ashore, swarming over the place; rushing, all nine of them, first of all, to see the glistening cedar shell, resting upon wooden struts, in the shed; to caress its polished sides; to exclaim at its beauty, and cry out in wonder at the intricacy of its rigging. They seized upon the great sweeps, from the blades of which the red and white of Cornell had not yet been scraped. Everything was wonderful; beyond all the words that they knew. But their eyes were eloquent.

"Well—" Harrison was a little awkward. "Hope you'll find it all right. Columbia's shack's the nearest, if you want anything—about half a mile up the track. And we'll be glad to do anything we can for you. Jim Rice—the Columbia coach, you know—he said he'd be down later, to see about your rigging and all that; or we'll send some one up——"

"Thanks—mighty good——"

He got away while the chorus of thanks still beat upon his ears. And as the launch slipped away the boys it left behind did a simple, boyish thing. They gathered close about Bradford, and gave the Brewster cheer, a long, complicated jumble of strange sounds, with three roaring repetitions of "Cornell—Cornell—Cornell!" at the end.

So they came to Poughkeepsie and the Hudson—completed that journey of three thousand miles, that they might row three miles more. They came with the clothes they wore, and their rowing things, and little beside—blankets, pillows, for the sybarites among them, a few pots and pans, a store of tinned food and of home-made jams and jellies and preserves.

"All right, let's get busy!" said Bradford. "Shaughnessy, you're cook to-day. Rustle some breakfast. Karl, you help him get a fire. Come on the rest of you, let's see the shack."

They found bunks in the big barn-like structure; rough furniture made of boxes and barrels and planks; a lean-to, in which there remained an old rusty stove. Swiftly they chose their bunks and spread out their blankets; stripped then, and in their shirts and trunks, and some of them in nondescript sweaters, swarmed out, demanding breakfast. The aroma of coffee filled the air; ham and eggs sizzled in the pans. They had tin plates and cups; knives, forks and spoons like those that soldiers have in their mess-kits. They ate and drank; lay, then, stretched out, basking in the sun, letting it bake out the stiffness and the weariness of the long hours on the train.

They were superb, lying thus, in their strength, in the glorious, smooth movement of the muscles under their tanned skins. When one rose and moved about, it was with the grace of some wild creature; two of them scuffled; they might have been gladiators in a Roman amphitheatre.

Bradford alone had not relaxed. He had eaten with the rest; gone then into the dark shed, to look again at the long shell. He stood there, with the look in his eyes that artists have at the sight of a great picture or lovers when they see their mistresses. So was his look compounded.

He had a curious thought; it came to him for the second time that day. He had slept badly through the night; just at dawn he had awakened, and through the car window he had seen water, lying under a mist, vague, like tarnished silver. Some instinct had told him it was the Hudson. And into his mind there had leaped the cry of those who were left of Xenophon's ten thousand when they saw the sea—"Thalassa! Thalassa!" Now again he thought of that.

For—although this was not in his mind—epics have been made of poorer stuff than the tale of how he had brought this crew to the river that Hudson found. Harrison, brought up in the rowing tradition of a great Eastern university, had wondered. He might have wondered more had he known all the story.

It was the projection of a dream upon the plane of actual life in which Steve Bradford stood that morning. It was the stuff of dreams he touched as his hand rested upon the cedar shell.

Some of all this must be told here, although there is not time or space to tell it all.

STEVE BRADFORD was born in a town where in the graveyards of the church there were the tombstones of many of his name, bearing letters, most of them, that age and wind and rain had come near to wiping out. After a year or two he had been taken far away, to the very edge of the world those ancestors of his had helped to make, since for his father it would have meant death to remain at home. So he had grown up far from all the things that were in the very core of his being.

John Bradford, his father, worked hard and well against the illness that weakened him. He managed his small resources; he raised fruit; he had great hopes. Always he talked to his son of his own youth, and of how Steve, when the time came, was to go home, and take his place in the long line of the Bradfords whose names had stood upon the rolls of Harvard. So the boy's goal had been plainly in his sight from his earliest days.

And he himself had made plans, too. Among the things the Bradfords had carried West with them were an old oar that his father had once pulled, and a faded, old-fashioned picture of a Harvard crew that had beaten Yale. Those had been John Bradford's great days, before illness had wasted his frame, and he had lived in them whenever he could.

So it had been that his son had begun to dream of the time when he, too, should sit in a Harvard shell, and look up, some time, after a race, to see a beaten crew from Yale still rowing. He was never tired of hearing all that his father could tell him; of reading whatever came his way concerning oarsmanship. He knew the names of all the great coaches; he knew how Lehmann differed from Bob Cook, and Charles Courtney from the Ten Eycks or Ellis Ward.

So he dreamed and hoped through his boyhood. And then, in the beginning of his adolescence, he had to put some part of his dream away. His eyes were clear; there was no need to tell him that it was idle to hope longer that the profits of the fruit ranch in that hot valley would grow so greatly that they would make it possible for him to go East when the time for college came.

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But almost at once, as is the way of those who dream with sane and healthy minds, he substituted a thing that he could still attain for that which was beyond his grasp. Rowing among the colleges was beginning then to come into its own on the Pacific coast. There were crews at California, at Stanford, at Washington. And to one of those Steve might still hope to go. There was talk, already, of sending a crew from the coast to Poughkeepsie; before Steve was ready to matriculate Washington actually made the journey. That crew was beaten, but it brought glory home with it; its defeat had been an honorable one.

Steve fixed his hopes upon the university that lies under Mount Rainier. He worked, the summer before he was ready for college, in Seattle; having finished early with school, he was there before college closed, and the coach, amused by his wide-eyed adoration, perhaps, was kind to him. Steve learned much in those days; came to understand the changes that had been wrought since his father's time; took his place a few times, reverently, in a scratch crew; learned the feel of a sweep, of the sliding seat; learned, too, to school his body to the stroke.

And then he was called home. His father's long fight had ended. Again Steve's dream was shattered. And again, when he could, he began to build it up anew out of the fragments that were left. He could not leave his mother and the ranch now to go away to school. Seattle—Palo Alto—Berkeley—they were alike beyond his reach. But near by, so near that he could attend his lectures and still do the work of the ranch, was Brewster—the struggling institution that stood as the monument of a pioneer who had given all that he had of money and of books for its foundation, fifty years before. John Harvard, when you think of it, had done no more than Adam Brewster.

There were no classic halls, no academic groves at Brewster. There were a few buildings, plain and ugly; a few hard-working teachers; earnest boys and girls, avid for knowledge. Youth had woven some shining threads into the gray stuff of

Brewster life, but they were few when Steve became a student. And still he dreamed.

At Brewster there had been, from time to time, a baseball team; other sports were unknown. And so, in the beginning, Steve's dream was a fantastic thing, impossible, absurd. But there was water near by; Lake Wah-eh-na. And almost from his first day he was at work. There were boats on the lake; indeed, it was that water, with its swimming, its boating, that gave most of its faint color to Brewster life.

Slowly others began to dream that old dream of Steve's, and to work with him, and under him, to make it real. In his second year, for the first time, he achieved a tangible result. It was then that a graduate, prospering greatly in San Francisco, bought a discarded shell from the University of California and shipped it to Brewster, with oars and such equipment as was vitally necessary.

Steve was transformed. At once he began to build his crew. Shaughnessy, who adored him as a small dog sometimes worships a big one, was his principal ally; between them they harried the others, enough of them, into sharing their desire. Steve taught them, out of his own scanty store of knowledge, how to row; evolved a stroke of sorts—a crude, powerful thing, that would have made a trained oarsman, seeing the wasted power, weep. But day by day the stroke grew smoother. And there was strength in those toiling backs, in the great thighs of those boys, such as no Eastern eight had ever owned!

There was no racing in that first year; just an endless grind of practise. They would row, easily, at a low stroke, ten miles, fifteen, in the twilight; they would practise quick dashes. In the second year there was a race with California, and to the wonder of all the rowing wisdom of the coast Brewster was beaten by less than half a length in a two-mile race that was a race, and a real one, from start to finish. And in the spring of Steve's senior year, what men still call a miracle came about, for that crude, unskilled Brewster crew rowed its way roughshod to victory over all three of the coast's great crews, and stood, without a rival, as champion of the year.

Then, indeed, Steve's dream shone from his eyes: To go East with his crew that he had wrought from nothing! Why not? The invitation had come—from stewards who knew only that they wanted a Western crew at Poughkeepsie, and that it must be the best the West could send.

But—to journey three thousand miles! To find the money. Steve knew what it would cost. So much for the fare. So much for food—which they would cook themselves. He had learned of the shack—of Cornell's readiness to lend a shell.

All Brewster rallied to him. The great men of the region, approached, hesitated; ended, some of them, by giving Steve their checks. Slowly the fund grew. The girls were aroused; they gave dances and parties; in a hundred ways they contrived to raise money. And at last Steve was able to say there was enough. He had been afraid he could not leave his mother and the ranch. But as to that, fate, which had buffeted him so long, turned to his aid. His mother wanted to visit friends and rest; a neighbor was ready to care for the place, on shares. The way was clear to go.

To go—yes. But not to return. Steve might sit up till dawn came through his windows, going over his figures, and still not reach a result that gave enough for the homeward journey. Sometimes the total fell short by this sum—sometimes by that. But always it fell short. And yet, he made his decision, suddenly—made it, and took the responsibility for it, and told no one of the problem that he faced. He was confident enough—there were Brewster men in the East, men who had succeeded and done well in New York and other cities. He could count upon them—they would never let a crew that had come from home to win at Poughkeepsie be wrecked in such a fashion, for the lack of a little money.

And not for a moment did Steve doubt that, if they reached the Hudson, they would win. They would have to win—they couldn't lose. He had never dreamed of stroking a beaten crew!

So they had come and so Steve could stand, thoughtful, grave, the responsibility of his leadership, of the men who had trusted him and followed him, darkening his eyes. But suddenly he laughed—went out into the sunshine.

"Come on—going to lie around all day?" he cried. "Let's put her overboard——"

They were up, laughing, shouting. Swiftly they kicked off their shoes, peeled off their sweaters. Four to a side they laid their hands upon the precious shell; carried it out; skied it, with a triumphant shout; lowered it, tenderly, carefully, into the water. One by one they took their places, bent to tie their laces; gripped the great oars.

And then, as they pushed away, the current caught the shell and carried it out into the stream; little Shaughnessy, tense and eager in the coxswain's seat, called his orders; the oars dipped into the water, and the shell was swung about, and headed into the sweeping current.

"Ready all—give way!"

The eight oars were like one; the shell leaped forward. Through Steve there ran such a thrill as he had never known in his most glorious dream. For this boat, this thing of paper thinness, of an incredible delicacy, lived beneath him; it had a voice that sang an answer to the rippling song of the living river; it had a heart and a soul. He laughed as he sent the stroke up and up; they leaped through the water that fought against their passage and fell back, beaten and outdone, only to come again to bar their way. And he was not alone; he was not himself; there were not eight laboring boys in that shell. They had been fused into one being as the tingling thrill of the adventure shot through them all. Oh, this was a crew, at last!

"Way enough—hold up, Steve——"

Bradford came to himself with Shaughnessy's laughing voice in his ears, to see the little chap's grin.

"Some one hailing us—I think it's Rice——"

The shell slid on for a little way as they rested on their oars. A hundred feet away was another crew; its members, resting likewise, were looking across, interested, curious. And between the two eights a power-boat poked its nose. In it stood a man who held a megaphone; he raised it, now, and spoke.

"Hello, Brewster!" he called. "You beat me to it. I was coming down! Everything all right?"

"Fine!" Steve answered for them all.

Rice looked them over. It was a curious look. Amusement was in it, respect, envy—much of that. But the coach never lived who wouldn't have looked enviously at such material. He turned, quickly; shouted an order to his own crew, and sent it off down stream.

"I want to see how your rigging is," he said, turning back to Brewster. "Take it easy, now—row."

He stopped them after a few strokes.

"Four—you're short on your swing—that's your outrigger. I'll stop and fix that. Go all the way forward, bow—you're coming back too quickly. That's where your check was—some of it. Don't be afraid to splash if you dig deep with your oar, two—you're not helping your boat now. Six—your hands are all tangled up, aren't they? Don't forget you've got a swivel lock—you're turning your wrists too much. You've got the idea, stroke—but don't hurry!"

They sat, staring. Steve had heard such talk before; it fell like music on his ears. If they could have a week—only a week!—of such a master! He would know what was wrong if he could see—but he must be in his place. And sitting there, doing his own work, he could only feel the check in the forward movement that should be smooth and sweeping—could only sense, without being able to explain, whatever break might come in the smooth rhythm a racing crew should have.

"Turn now," said Rice. "Make it snappy, now—go back to your quarters as if you were in the last mile of a race! I want to see what you can do. When you get there we'll fix those seats."

They waited. Steve turned in his seat to look back at the seven men behind him. Karl Veblen, seven, who stroked the shell's port side, grinned at him; then his face fell back into a fighting phase, grim and tense. Steve turned again, satisfied.

"All right—let's go," he said to Shaughnessy, and the coxswain, loose, nervous fingers on his lines, leaned forward.

"Ready—go!" he snapped.

There was a swift moment of splashing; then they were off. The shell jumped through the water. Rice watched them, frowning; turned to the man beside him. But Steve saw nothing, heard nothing. He could feel the break in the rhythmic movement now; it maddened him. But there was nothing for it save to row harder—to drag the boat along, as best he could.

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His pulses pounded against his temples; the sweat ran down into his eyes.

"Way—e—nough!" Shaughnessy's hail stopped them. They were opposite the float. Shaughnessy, at least, knew his business; swiftly and skilfully he brought them in, and Rice, stepping ashore from his launch as they lifted the shell, nodded. Steve went forward, rather shyly; Rice shook hands with him.

"You coached this crew yourself—as well as stroking it?" he said.

Steve nodded.

"There wasn't any one else," he said. "And we didn't have money enough to pay a coach."

"You've worked a miracle," said Rice. "I wouldn't have said it could be done. Your lot's green—they've faults to make a man cry watching them! I'd give a finger to have you for a month!"

His manner changed.

"I'll fix your rigging—that'll help you some," he said. "And if you like, I'll give you an hour whenever I can spare the time —which'll not be often, with three crews of my own to watch! I can see things you'll have no way of telling. And I see this now —that in your place I'd bring that big Swede from bow to seven, and put seven at bow. He's the best oar you've got, barring yourself, is seven—but the other lad'll do well enough there. At five—but, no—he's not too big. Try him at seven, will you?"

"Sure! Youngstrom—you and Karl change seats."

Rice was busy already with the outriggers. Swiftly he corrected minor matters of balance; work that would take time he showed Steve how to do.

"Good luck to you!" he said, when he was ready to go in pursuit of his own men. "If my lot can't win, I hope you do! But—you've about one chance in a hundred of doing it."

He laughed at the swift volley of questions and protests that greeted that. Why not? They'd come to win——

"You'll be doing well if you finish third —you can be proud if you do that——"

"We won't be!" Steve said that, and his voice rang out defiantly. "We're not after any moral victory!"

"More power to you!" said Rice, and laughed again. "I'll help you all I can. Take it easy to-day—get your shell ready. Better take a long row in the morning—save your sprints for afternoon, when it's cool."

He went off. There was plenty to be done. Shaughnessy, as cook, got money from Steve, and went off to buy supplies; others worked at the outriggers, following Rice's instructions. Along the railway track, presently, came the correspondents —students, who came to Poughkeepsie with the crews, and paid their way, and earned a bit more, besides, by telegraphing the news of the camps to various papers in many cities.

THE Brewster crew was a windfall for them; there was colorful stuff, such as sporting editors would not cut, to be written about such visitors. They wanted to know all Steve could tell them of their trip, of their victory in the great regatta on the coast, of the history of Brewster rowing. And as they listened to a story that came to them spasmodically, in jerky answers to questions that grew more and more searching and eager, they exclaimed, and stared at one another in incredulous delight.

"They're always yelling at me about human interest!" said one. "I hope they know it when they see it!"

Steve and the rest learned things from these embryo reporters, too. That Cornell ought to sweep the river—although Syracuse was dangerous, and Columbia, possibly, a dark horse. Pennsylvania was reckoned weak.

"How do they figure us?" Ladd asked.

"Don't," was the cheerful answer. "But the Lord knows you're husky enough if you've got any form!"

They were growing to hate all reference to form. They had no form; they knew it. All they had was power—the power to drive their shell through the water. And—after all, wasn't that the main idea? What was the use of all this talk of form?

They saw all the other crews that afternoon; watched them as they went by, followed by their launches, with men worrying them through megaphones, barking, snapping at their heels. And they knew that they were bigger, stronger; that, man for man, they could meet those others and conquer them. They had been sure of themselves before; not aggressive, not arrogant, but sure. And now that they had seen the men they must defeat they were doubly sure.

They had many visitors next day; townspeople from Poughkeepsie and Highland; stray fellows, oarsmen and camp followers, from the other training camps; a famous rowing expert, writer for a New York paper, who made a special trip to see them row, and looked wise, and talked technicalities that only Steve could even begin to understand.

Rice followed them for a while when, as the shadows grew long, they took their afternoon work-out. They were glad of his help, and they tried to follow his advice. Thanks to him, that day, and in the days that followed, when, as he found the time, he kept his promise to help them, they corrected some of their more glaring faults. But they were bound to go to the start a crude crew, seconds slower than a far less powerful set of men prepared by long training for a race. That much they acknowledged themselves. But they believed they had the strength to overcome that handicap.

Steve, with that problem of his own oppressing him, that knowledge that none shared, had wasted no time before writing to Brewster men who were settled in New York, in Philadelphia, in Eastern cities generally. From some he never heard at all; some answered, cordially enough, regretting their inability to help him; from three who did send checks he got, in all, twenty-five dollars. He was not worried yet, but a week saw him concerned. He watched the mails; hoped, against a fading hope, that some one of those who had not yet answered him would help.

It was hard to worry about anything there. All day long they were at work. They rowed more than the coaches wanted any of their crews to do; for some of them, day by day, since all the work of cooking and cleaning was done by all in turn, there were other tasks than rowing. They were up early, and in the river for a swim; sometimes they went overboard again, before their early bedtime, just before they slept.

Three days before the race they found a stranger waiting for them when they came in from their evening row. They had no difficulty in seeing him; he wore a suit of vivid black-and-white check, a silk shirt to arouse the envy of a bird of paradise; a diamond ring that caught the light of the fading sun and flung it back.

"Which of you's Bradford?" he cried. Steve spoke; the visitor flung himself upon him and wrung his hand. "Put her there! Boy—I sure am for you! You don't know me. You will. You're shaking hands with J. Spencer Hamilton!"

Steve's heart leaped. He had written to this man. Little as he looked the part, he was an alumnus of Brewster. He had had a meteoric career in real estate speculation in Los Angeles; latterly he had been dazzling New York.

"This is great—simply great!" said Hamilton. "Going to eat? Am I invited? Am I? Say—what I can't do to what you're aiming to cook there simply isn't worth doing! Boys! it was a sight for sore eyes to see the way you stepped along out there! I've seen them all—all the good ones—Yale—Harvard—all of them, I tell you! And you've got them faded! Say—Saturday's going to be the day for the native sons to sit up and howl!"

Steve's concern fell from him. He didn't care how this man talked—so long as he felt right. Nor what sort of mad clothes he chose to wear. He was rich—that was plain. Was he likely to balk at a hundred and fifty dollars—Steve needed no more than that to get them all home again!—in such a cause?

After supper Hamilton beckoned to him, and they stepped out of the firelight, and walked along the track.

"Got your letter yesterday—been out of town," said Hamilton. "Boy—you've got nerve, and that's what I like! How much you need?"

Steve explained the situation; was prepared to display the actual figures.

"Chicken feed!" said Hamilton, interrupting him. "Say—you boys win this race, and you'll go home on limited trains at my expense! See? Day coaches and tourist sleepers?—not if my name's J. Spencer Hamilton! And you're going to win—don't you tell me you're not!"

"Sure we are," said Steve, deep in his throat.

"That's the stuff! Say—it ain't much of a town, but it'll do—we'll paint Poughkeepsie just as red as it can be done Saturday night! You come along over, after the race, and you'll find me at the Nelson House. Know where that is, don't you?"

Steve nodded. Launches had called and taken them across the river a few times.

"Right, then! I've got to be toddling along—got to get back to town—big deal on in the morning. Don't forget, in case I don't see you before—the Nelson House, after the race!"

He said good-by to them all effusively; left them, cheered and inspired.

THEY went over the course in a time trial next evening—or in what would have been a time trial had they had a launch to follow them and timers to clock them. What they did was to row themselves out in the three miles, and to row better and faster, as they knew, than they had ever done before.

And then—Saturday, at last, and the day to which all their work, all that epic struggle, all of Steve's dreams, had brought them. A day that began hazily, with a threat of thunder squalls; with a great train of flat cars moving up toward Krum's Elbow to be ready for the start—flat cars on which tiers of benches had been built, gay with flags and bunting.

They took the shell out in the morning to practise starts; came back, afterward, and loafed about, nervously. They watched the crowds making their way to their places in the train; watched, too, every ripple on the river, every movement of the banked clouds in the northwest. A light wind blew across the course from the west; the water was likely to be best in the lanes nearest the shore—and they were second in the draw, just outside of Syracuse, with Columbia, Cornell and Pennsylvania beyond them, in that order.

Early in the afternoon the long train began to move; already they had seen Columbia's junior eight going down to the start. They heard the long, rumbling cheers; the burst of sound from foghorns that greeted the finish—only to be repeated half an hour later when the Cornell freshmen won their race—Syracuse had upset calculations in the first contest.

They were keyed up and tense then. Their time was nearly at hand. An official boat came up; a man gave orders through a megaphone. They were to go to their stake-boat. The Columbia launch went up-stream, kicking up a great swirl of water.

"All right—come on!" said Steve.

Gingerly, with nervous hands, they launched the shell; awkwardly they climbed in. Steve waited till all were in; moved along, making sure that every lacing was tight and sound; that every man was comfortable in his seat. Then he slipped into his own seat; thrust his feet into the shoes; tied his laces. They shoved off; paddled slowly, easily, down to the start. Columbia, already boated, greeted them with friendly cries; Syracuse was grimly silent. Some Pennsylvania man was fussing; weren't they ever going to start?

They were at the stake-boat; a man leaned forward, holding the stern of the shell; the oars beat daintily, holding the boat in line against the sweep of the tide. Steve sat waiting. He glanced at the other crews; they had grown in stature, suddenly. He wondered if any other stroke were as nervous as he. Two miles to the bridge—easy to there! So Rice had told him; so his own knowledge, all he had ever heard or read of rowing, had taught him. But suppose some other crew ran away with the race in those first two miles—gained a long lead, and did not crack in the last mile? Such things had happened.

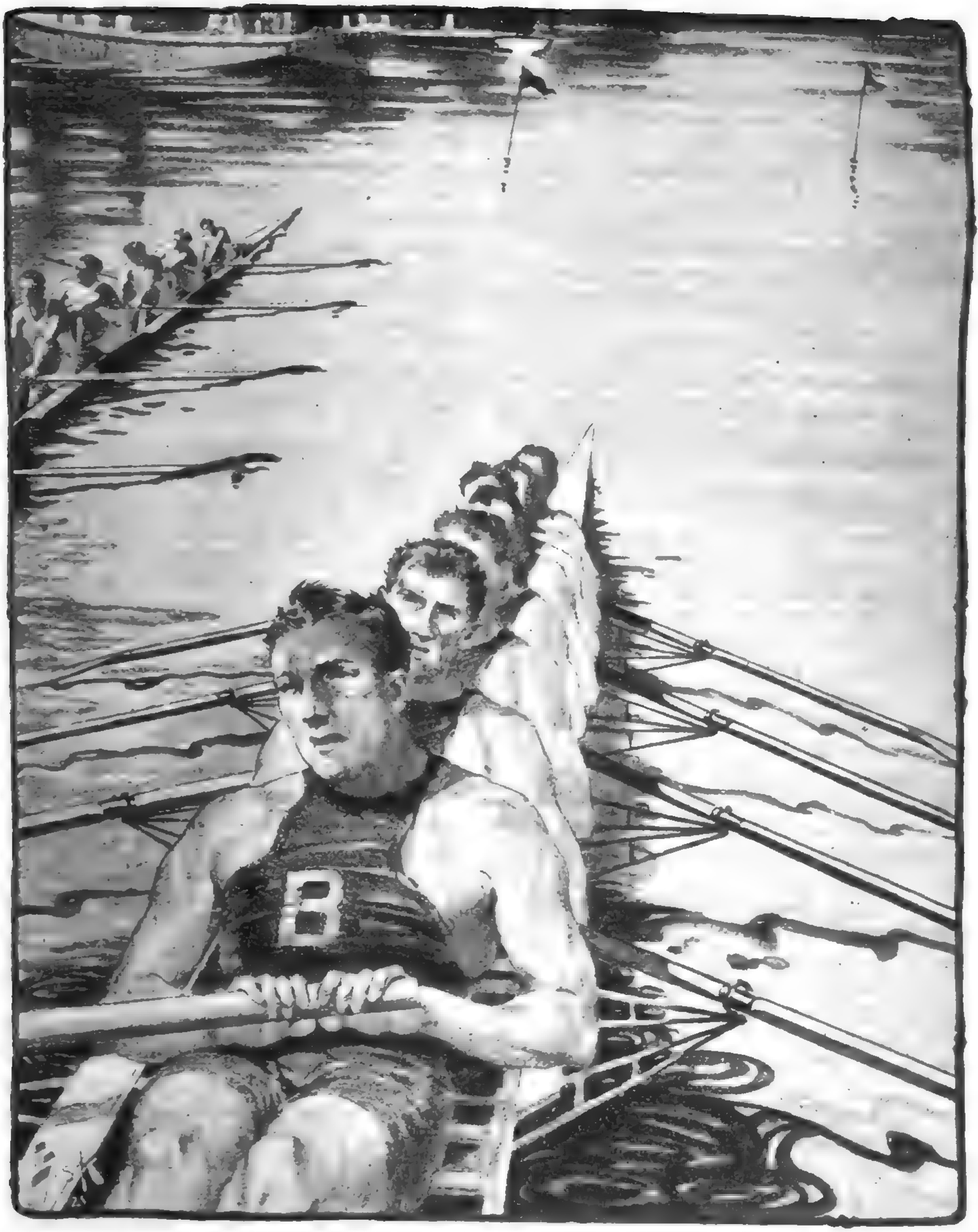
He was, all at once, tremendously alone. Those others—they had only to follow him. It was he who would win or lose; he knew that. In that shell, behind him, was the strength to win; to drive the boat through those three miles of water faster than the rest. But he—everything depended upon him, rested upon his judgment. Suppose he delayed the sprint too long—suppose he wore his men out by too great an early pace? Suppose—a score of things.

"Wake up!"

Shaughnessy's voice aroused him. He heard the referee:

"Are you rea-ady—Penn? Cornell? Are you ready, Columbia? Brewster?" Steve flung up his right hand in answer. "Ready, Syracuse? Ready—all!"

The seats slid forward; they waited, tense, expectant. A hush fell upon the river; the cheers from the long train were stilled. A pistol cracked and Steve saw the stake-boat rush away before he realized that he had begun to row with the sound.



There was a pounding, a mad singing in his ears. He no longer saw the other crews. He never saw at all the yachts, lined up beside the course. He had to row; to pull that oar; to row faster than he had ever done. He knew fear; a deadly, sick thing that tore at him, body and soul. And then he ceased to think, and only felt and labored.

They were off; there was a great splashing behind him for a moment, and he could feel the nervous, broken rush of the shell in those first strokes. But then they caught the beat, and the shell surged forward smoothly, evenly.

At first he had to concentrate upon the sheer motions of rowing; on the swift forward rush of the slides in the recovery; the long, slow backward pull; the snap of the wrists as he brought his oar up out of the water. He could hear Shaughnessy's constant exhortations:

"Steady, three—into it, four! All the way back, seven—don't hurry it, Ed——"

Then he was counting; thirty-four—up a notch to thirty-five—enough in the first half-mile, now that the flurry of the start was over. Steve stole a glance to his left; he could see the shore, the train, crawling like some vividly colored snake; another shell, well back. He stared at that dully for a moment; then understood, with a leaping of his pulses, that he was seeing the Syracuse crew behind, and slipping farther back at every stroke! They must be leading—and doing it without an effort!

His eyes strayed to the right, and he saw Cornell, as far back on that side as was Syracuse on the other. But—he could see nothing of Pennsylvania or Columbia.

"Penn leading—Columbia fighting her—they've got us a length—open water, maybe!" Shaughnessy was whispering his report. Steve could not turn; he could see only a crew behind his own, or one on even terms with it.

He wanted to increase his stroke, shoot up the beat a stroke or two to the minute. But everything that he had ever learned fought in his brain to conquer that emotional desire.

"First mile—Penn and Columbia are going away from us!"

That was Shaughnessy again, and Steve, hearing, kept grimly, doggedly, to his pace. He could still see Syracuse and Cornell, hanging on. But those others—the crews he couldn't see! Were they wearing themselves out? Then why didn't they begin to come back? He longed for the sight of their sterns against the distant eastern shore. Insensibly, almost, the beat of his stroke went up. Shaughnessy was counting again. Thirty-eight—thirty-nine!

Something was between him and the shore at last. He saw the flash of oars—light blue and white, gleaming in the sun—and then the Pennsylvania shell came sliding back. Exultingly he flung himself into the race. The stroke went up and up—forty—forty-two. Penn went back and back—Columbia met the challenge of his swifter stroke, answered it, began to draw away again. And once more, all caution, all thought of what he had heard and learned flung away from him, he sought to drive his shell ahead.

But always Syracuse and Cornell stayed with him; they hung on, doggedly, meeting every spurt; holding the pace he set, but never seeking to reduce Brewster's lead.

He had eyes for them no longer. It was Columbia that he watched, as best he could. He was beginning to feel the throbbing of his temples; the pounding of his heart, the labor of his lungs. He longed for the bridge; to see its shadow upon his knee as they went under. And then, all at once, it was there; he looked up, and saw it, incredibly high, and slender, and aloof. Another mile!

His eyes went back to Columbia. And they grew fierce as he saw the faltering of a beaten crew; the sudden loss of power; the way the shell slipped back! They were in the last mile now—the last three-quarters. And they led; all the others were pursuing them. Columbia went back and back; it was less that Cornell passed her than that she dropped behind. And yet—here was Cornell, holding on. Was that all?

Wasn't the brown, naked back of the Cornell bow-oar bigger than it had been a moment before? How could he see so plainly now the line between the red and white on the blade of his oar—just now the colors had been blurred, had run together. And as he looked to the left he knew—for Syracuse was creeping up.

Desperately he called for greater efforts still. And behind him the men he led responded to his call; faster and faster still they moved. But always Syracuse and Cornell came on; they were as relentless, as inexorable, as fate itself. Now he could no longer see the bow-oars as he glanced to right and left; he was level with the men in the waists of both shells.

There was a pounding, a mad singing in his ears. He knew that he was uttering strange sounds, quite meaningless. The chatter that poured through Shaughnessy's megaphone ceased to have any form; it was a jumble of angry words, confused, run together, that he heard. The world grew small; it held his oar; the scar on Shaughnessy's shoulder. It was as if the very walls of the world were closing in upon him.

He no longer saw the other crews. He never saw at all the yachts, lined up beside the course. He had to row; to pull that oar; to row faster than he had ever done. He knew fear; a deadly, sick thing, that tore at him, body and soul. And then he ceased to think, and only felt and labored.

Somewhere in another world there was a terrific noise; a rending, roaring noise. Slowly, into his consciousness, words came.

"Way enough—all right—all over——"

Water splashed in his face as he dropped for a moment on his oar. A fearful cramp had seized him, doubling him up. He fought it; sat up; forced himself to look about.

THERE was a great sound of cheering, a din of foghorns and shrill whistles. He stared, curiously, at a white yacht, upon the deck of which men leaped up and down, shaking one another by the hand. The Syracuse crew was struggling up; on the other side the Cornell shell floated quietly. He knew when he saw those men. He understood, and understanding was like a knife, reaching for his heart.

"Well done, Brewster! Greatest race we ever had!" An official launch had come up; a white-haired man stood up, waving to them. "Cornell by a second—you beat Syracuse for second place! Want a tow back to quarters?"

There was an angry murmur behind him.

"Thanks—no—we'll get back!"

He turned in his seat.

"Come on—long cheer for Cornell. Hip-hip——"

They pulled themselves together in a moment; turned; rowed back up-stream, against the turning tide. And their way was a way of honor and of glory. Cheers followed them; yachts dipped their colors to them. Had they won they could have had no greater tribute. They did not know then, as they did next day, that every writer whose business it was to describe that race, and who knew that business, was saying that, had they had the coaching of any of the other crews, there would have been lengths of open water between them and the second shell. And it would not have lessened their bitterness had they known.

Wearily they dragged themselves from the shell; lifted it from the water for the last time; ran it in.

"You fellows—I can't say much—you did your best—and it was good enough to win—" Steve faced them. "I'm the one who fell down—I'm sorry——"

He shook his head as they protested.

"We had everything!" he said. "Except—what I thought I had—just knowing how to row a race——"

He turned and walked away. In the others, already, the taste of defeat was losing some of its bitterness; there was, in them, a lifting of bruised pride, a resurgence of the spirit of their youth. But he stood by himself, head down, looking at the river, dark and somber, save where the colors of the sunset lighted it.

He had come home, to the East, to the country of his dreams and his memories and the hopes of all his boyhood. The oldest, the commonest, the most comforting of a boy's dreams had brought him—the hope of coming home, a conqueror. And the East had beaten him, rejected him. . . .

Youngstrom's great hand fell on his shoulder.

"Don't you care, cap," he said. "We—by glory—we made them work! Say—guess we won't be helping Mr. J. Spencer Hamilton celebrate to-night, though? Guess we'll stay right here——"

Steve started; the hot color flamed in his cheeks. "We—no—I've got to go, though," he said. "Hamilton—he promised——"

His eyes were wide with dismay. He had not remembered, since the ending of the race! But now—they must know—he must tell them.

"You fellows—I didn't tell you," he said. "We're stranded! I haven't money enough to take us home."

Swiftly he explained. His eyes searched them; sought reproach, disgust. And they saw only mirth—smiles that grew into laughter as he finished.

"Who cares?" said Veblen. "Hey—we've been broke before—guess we'll be broke again!"

"Sure!" Youngstrom echoed. "Who cares? If we can't work our way home—better stay here!"

Steve's heart leaped. "All right!" he cried. "Come on, then—let's go tell Hamilton it's all off—as long as we lost!"

They sang as they strode down the tracks to Highland; singing still, and with the bearing of conquerors, they marched up the Poughkeepsie hill. There were many eyes to follow them; many voices to give them cheerful greeting. They answered all who hailed them, but they went straight on, to the hotel. Hamilton was there; he came to them, slapping them on the back, shouting their praises.

"You did great!" he cried. "Too bad you lost—but what's a measly second?" He drew a thick roll of bills from a pocket; held it out to Steve. "Here—go home in a private car if you like!"

"But—we lost!" said Steve, and stared at him.

"I didn't!" Hamilton laughed. "Bet the old bank-roll on you—for place! I like a sure thing when I can find it—and they thought I was crazy, at that, and gave me any odds I liked!"

But Steve stood still, staring at the money, making no move to take it. Behind him, from the crew, he heard a low-toned, sullen murmur. He turned to look at them.

"No thanks!" he said. "If you'd bet and lost—oh, hell, we'll get home!"

"Sure—sure!" said Youngstrom. "We lost—here's where we pay!"

They began to shoulder their way through the crowd. Hamilton stared after them, his jaw fallen, his eyes full of wonder. And as they went their laughter rose, like a gale.

"Come on—home!" said Steve. "Say—I know a man—right here. He needs help. He'll hire us—let's go see him——"

MONDAY had come, and as a whistle blew, at noon, Steve straightened up in the trench in which he worked, laid down his shovel. He looked at the rest; at Youngstrom, grinning at him, at Veblen, rubbing the sweat from his forehead, at little Shaughnessy, scolding Potocki for a deviation from his line. He could see the river, and he remembered how he had felt, that day, two weeks before, when he had seen it first, and that cry of Xenophon's Greeks—"Thalassa! Thalassa!"—had risen to his lips. And he knew, now, that it would be only when he led them again to the sight of the western sea that washed the shores of home that he could really echo that shout of triumph.

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If Winter Comes

Concluding Instalment

By A. S. M. Hutchinson

Illustrations by H. Pern Bird

THE first witness before the coroner's jury called to inquire into the death of Effie Bright was a druggist who testified that Mark Sabre had bought oxalic acid from him the day before Effie and her baby were found dead in Sabre's house.

Sabre's friend, Hapgood, continues his description of the hearing.

Next witness. Chap I'd seen serve the divorce papers on Sabre at Brighton. Solicitor's clerk. Humpo handles him very impressively—also very carefully. Informs him no need to tell the court on what business he went down to Sabre's house on the fatal Saturday. "Sufficient," says Humpo, "that it was legal business of a deeply grave nature implicating the deceased and the man Sabre?" Witness agrees. Court nearly chokes itself whispering conjectures. "And you saw the deceased but not the man Sabre?" Witness agrees again. Goes on, led by Humpo, to state that he served certain papers on the deceased. That she looked noticeably unhappy, frightened, lonely, deserted, when she opened the door to him. Had great difficulty in obtaining from her the whereabouts of the man Sabre. At first refused to tell. No, didn't actually say she had been told not to tell; but, yes, certainly gave that impression. Extracted from her that he was probably at Brighton. Couldn't get anything more out of her.

"Look here—" says Sabre. "Look here. Look here, she didn't know!"

"I am not surprised," says Humpo, "I am not at all surprised." Court laughs cynically. "You have interrupted us a great deal," says Humpo. "It is time we saw if you will be equally informative in the witness-box."

Some one bawls: "Next witness. Mark Sabre."

Court draws an enormous breath and gets itself ready for butchery to make a Tidborough holiday.

HAPGOOD went on:

I'm telling you, old man, that after the coroner had done with him, and after this Humpo, with his viprous forefinger, and his retriever tongue, and his perspiration streaming down his face, and Twyning tugging him down by the coat and putting him on the trail afresh—after the coroner, and after this Humpo, like that, had been on to him for a bit, Sabre absolutely couldn't speak. He was like he had a constriction in his throat. There was nothing he could say but begin all his sentences "Look here—Look here—" and nine times out of ten incapable of anything to follow it up with.

He was distraught. He was speechless. He was clean crazed.

At the very beginning, with the coroner, he wouldn't use the word "the deceased." Insisted on calling her Effie. Coroner kept pulling him up over it, and about the twentieth time pulled him up hard.

Poor chap threw out his arms like he was throwing the word away and then hammered on the ledge. "I *won't* say deceased. I *won't* call her the deceased. Vile word. Horrible word. Obscene, beastly, hateful word. I won't call her it. Why should I call her the deceased?"

"Control yourself," says Buddha. "Control yourself."

He only waved and thumped again. "I won't. I *won't*. Why should I call her the deceased? I knew the girl. I was fond of the girl. She was my friend. She was fond of me. I did more for her than any one in this court—her father or any one. When she was in trouble she came to me and I succored her. She lived in my house. She cooked my meals for me. We went through it together. I've known her for years. I've liked her for years. And now she's dead and you turn around and tell me to call her the deceased. Effie. *Effie.* Do you hear? *Effie.*"

They couldn't stop him. He was like a sick wolf then, cornered, and Buddha like a big, wary boarhound, going in at him, and jumping up on the wall out of the way. They stopped him when Humpo got at him. They wore him down then. He was like that wolf then with a rope round his neck, tied to a post, and every time he'd fly out with "Look here— Look here—" the rope would catch him, and over he'd go and Humpo in, worrying him again.

Like this. Link on link of the chain against him and brick by brick of the wall around him. Like this.

"What date did the deceased leave your wife's employment?"

"In March. In March last year. Look here——"

"Did she leave of her own wish or was she dismissed?"

"Look here——"

"Was she dismissed because your wife suspected you of relations with her?"

"Look here——"

"Answer the question."

"Well, but look *here*——"

"Answer the question, sir."

"Look here——"

"Very well, sir. Very well. Answer me this question then. Is it the fact that your wife has instituted divorce proceedings against you?"

"Look *here*——"

Court surging with sensation at this dramatic disclosure. Humpo mopping his face, keeping the great forefinger going. Sabre clutching the desk like a man in asthma. Twyning tugging at Humpo's coat. "Yes, yes," says Humpo, bending down, then launches at Sabre again.

"Is it the fact that in these proceedings the deceased woman is named as co-respondent?"

"Look here——"

"You keep asking me to look here, sir, but you tell me nothing. I ask you plain questions. Have you nothing better than 'Look here?' Is it the fact that these papers were served on you at Brighton on the occasion of your flight?"

"Flight—flight. Look here——"

"Is it the fact?"

"Yes, Brighton, yes. But, look here—flight! Flight! Holiday, I tell you. Holiday."

"Holiday!" cries Humpo. "Do you tell me holiday, sir? Holiday! I thank you for that word. We will examine it in a moment. This was at Brighton, then. The business of the witness whom we have recently seen in the box was to serve the papers on you and on the deceased. Now come back a little. Let me ask you to carry back your mind to the summer of 1915," and with his wagging forefinger, he takes the unhappy man through all the stuff he had got out of old Bright—Sabre's apparently uncalled-for interest in the girl, first getting her from her father's house to the neighborhood of his own, then under his own roof, and all the rest of the unholy chain of it. Then he mops himself dry, and hurls in again.

"Now, sir, this holiday. This pleasant holiday by the sea! Did you make any preparations for it, any little purchases?"

"No. Purchases? No. Look here——"

"Never mind about 'look here,' sir. No purchases? Did you hear the evidence of the witness—the Alton chemist who declared on oath that you made a purchase in his shop on the very day before you started—a purchase you have admitted? Remembering that, do you still say you made no purchases for your—holiday?"

"Nothing to do with it. Nothing——"

"Nothing to do with it? Well, sir, we will accept that for a moment. Do you often go shopping in Alton?"

The poor beggar shook his head. No voice in his throat.

"Do you shop there once in a month, once in six months?"

Shook again.

"Are there chemists in the Garden Home, in Tidborough, in Chovensbury?"

Nods.

"Are you known in all these places I have mentioned?"

Nods.

"Are you known in Alton?"

Shakes.

"Are all these places nearer to you than Alton?"

Nods.

Humpo's finger shoots out about two yards long; dashes back his mane with his other hand; rushes in from under it: "Then, sir, will you tell the jury why, to make this purchase of oxalic acid on the day before you leave home, why you go to a place in which you are unknown and to a place farther away from you than three other centers, one at your very door?"

Sabre sees like a hit in the face this new thing that's coming at him. Gasps. Puts up his hand to that choked throat of his. Strangles out: "Look here——"

"Answer the question, sir."

Stammers out like a chap croaking: "Walk. Walk. Wanted a walk. Wanted to get out. Wanted to get away from it."

Back goes the mane and in again like a flash: "Ah, you wanted to get out of it? The house with its inmates was becoming insupportable to you?"

"Look here——"

"I'm giving you your own words, sir. Do you tell us that, although you were leaving—for a holiday—on the very next day—still, on the afternoon before, you felt you must get out of it? Is that right, sir?"

"Look here——"

"Very well. Let us leave that, sir. We seem to be compelled to leave a great deal, but the jury will acquit me of any fault. Let us come to the purpose of this oxalic acid. Nothing to do with your holiday, you say. With what, then? For what purpose?"

LONG pause. Frightful pause. Hours. Whole court holding its breath. Pause like a chunk of eternity. Silent as that. Empty as that. What the devil was he thinking of? Had he forgotten? Was he awake now to the frightful places he kept getting into and wondering if this was another and where exactly it lay? Appalling pause. Dashed woman somewhere in the court goes off into hysterics and dragged out. He didn't hear a scream of it, poor baited chap in the box. Just stood there. Gray as a raked-out fire. Face twitching. Awful. I tell you, awful. Nearly went into hysterics myself. Humpo slopping his tongue round his jaws watching him like a dog watching its dinner being cut up. After about two years slaps in his tongue and demands: "Come, sir, for what purpose did you buy this oxalic acid?"

Sabre gives his first clear, calculated words since he had got up there. I guess he *had* been pulling himself together to look for a trap. He said very slowly, tying each word, like a chap feeling along on thin ice, he said: "Effie—asked—me—to—get—it—to—clean—my—straw—hat—for me—for—Brighton."

That Humpo! Very gently, very quietly, like a rescuer pushing out a ladder to the man on the ice: "The deceased asked you to get it to clean your straw hat for you for Brighton." And then like a trap going off he snapped and threw Sabre clean off the balance he was getting. "Then it *was* obtained for the purpose of your holiday?"

"Look *here*——" All at sea again, d'you see? And the end was quicker than nothing. Twyning pulls Humpo's coat and points at Sabre's hat, soft hat, on the ledge before him. Humpo nods, delighted.

"And did she carry out her intention, sir? Did she clean your straw hat for you?"

Nods.

"You don't appear to be wearing it?"

Shakes.

"Pray, where then is this straw hat to clean which you obtained the oxalic acid? Is it at your house?"

Shakes.

"Not at your house! Odd. Where then?"

"Look here——"

"Where then?"

"Look here——"

"Answer the question, sir. Where is this straw hat?"

"Look here—" Gulps. "Look here—" Gulps again. "Look here. I lost it in the sea at Brighton."

Humpo turned like a flash to the coroner. Inspiration. Inspired in hell. Turns like a flash to the coroner. "I have done with this witness, sir." Sits down. Plump. Court lets go its breath like the four winds round a chimney. Sabre staggers out of the box. Falls across into his seat.

Too much for me, old man. I bawled out, people in front of me nearly jumping out of their skins with the start, I bawled out: "I saw the witness at Brighton and he told me he'd lost his hat in the sea."

Buddha, like a talking idol discovering an infidel in his temple: "Who are you, sir?"

"I'm a solicitor. I'm Mr. Sabre's solicitor."

Buddha to Sabre: "Have you a solicitor in the court, Sabre?"

"No! No! Get away! Get out of it! Get away from me!"

"You have no standing in this court, sir," says Buddha.

Awful. Nothing to be done. Sorry I'd spoken. After all, telling me about his hat, what did it prove? Nothing. If anything, easily could be twisted into cunning preparation of his plan beforehand. Useless. Futile.

Case went on. Presently Twyning in the box. Last witness—put up to screw down the lid on Sabre's coffin, to polish up the argument before it went to the jury. Stood there with the venom frothing at the corners of his mouth, stood there a man straight out of the loins of Judas Iscariot, stood there making his testimony more damning a thousand times by pretending it was being dragged out of him, reluctant to give away his business companion. Told a positively damning story about meeting Sabre at the station on his departure from leave a day after the girl was sacked. Noticed how strange his manner was; noticed he didn't like being asked about circumstances of her dismissal; noticed his wife hadn't come to see him off. Yes, thought it odd. Sabre had explained wife had a cold, but saw Mrs. Sabre in Tidborough very next day. Yes, thought the whole thing funny because had frequently seen Sabre and the girl together during Sabre's leave. Any particular occasion? Well, did it really matter? Must he really answer? Yes, notably in the Cloister tea-rooms late one evening. Well, yes, had thought their behavior odd, secretive. Sabre's position in the office? Well, was it really necessary to go into that? Well, had to admit Sabre was no longer a member of the firm. Had been suspended during intimacy with the deceased, now dismissed consequent upon this grave development. Had he ever had occasion in the past, in earlier days, to remonstrate with Sabre concerning attitude toward the girl? Well, scarcely liked to say so, hated to say so, but certainly there had been such occasions. Yes, had spoken seriously to Sabre about it.

There ripped across the court as he said that, old man, a woman's voice from the back. *"It's a lie. It's an abominable lie. And you know it's a lie!"*

By Jove, I tell you! I nearly swallowed my back teeth with the effect of the thing. Give you my word I thought for a minute it was the girl come to life and walked in out of her coffin. That voice! High and clear and fine and true as an Angelus bell across a harvest-field. *"It's a lie. It's an abominable lie; and you know it's a lie!"*

Eh? Terrific? I tell you terrific isn't the word. It was the Fairfax business at the trial of King Charles over again. It absolutely was. Buddha nearly had a fit: "Silence! How dare you, madam! Turn out that woman! Who is that?"

Commotion. A woman pressed out from the mob behind and walked up the court like a goddess, like Portia, by Jove, like Euphrosyne. "Let no one dare to touch me," she said. "I am Lady Tybar. Every one knows me here. I've just come in—just heard this shameful business; all of you killing him between you." She pointed a hand at Twyning. "And you, I tell you before all this court, and you may take what steps you like, I tell you, that you are a liar, an experienced and calculating liar." And she went with that to old Sabre and stooped over him and touched him with her hands and said: "Marko, Marko."

You know she'd got that blooming court stiff and cold. The suddenness and the decision and the—the arrogance of the thing took 'em all ends up and had 'em speechless. She was there by Sabre and stooping over him, mothering him, before Buddha or any of 'em could have found the wits to say what his own name was. Let alone the Iscariot.

Matter of fact Sabre was the first one to speak. He threw up his arm from where he'd been covering his face, just as he'd thrown it up when I called out, and swung her hands aside and called out: "Don't touch me. Let me alone. Leave me alone."

She motioned to the man beside him and the chap got up as if her motion had been Circe's and disappeared. Through the roof or somewhere. I don't know. Anyway he vanished. And she took his place and sat down beside Sabre, and poor old Sabre crouched away from her as if he was stung and old Buddha, reaching out for his dignity, said: "You may remain there, madam, if you do not interrupt the court."

There wasn't much more to interrupt. Twyning had had about as much as he wanted; he'd done what he was out to do anyway. The case finished. The coroner had a go at the jury. They went out. I suppose they were gone ten minutes. Shuffled in again. Gave their verdict. I was watching Sabre. He took down his hands from his face and stared with all the world's agony in his face, straining himself forward to hear. Verdict. They found suicide while temporarily insane and added their most severe censure of the conduct of the witness Sabre. He jumped up and flung out his hands: "Look here—— Look here. Censure! Censure! Cens——"

Dropped back on his seat like he was shot. Twisted himself up. Sat rocking.

Court cleared in less than no time. Me left in my corner. This Lady Tybar. Sabre, twisted up. Bobby or two. I began to come forward. Sabre looks up. Looks round. Gets his hat. Collects his old stick. Starts to hobble out.

This Lady Tybar gets in front of him, me alongside of her by then: "Marko, Marko." (That was what she called him.) He sort of pushes at her and at me: "Let me alone. Let me alone. Get right away from me." Hobbles away down the room.

A bobby stops him. "Better go this way, sir. Rough lot of people out there." Leads him to a side door.

We followed him up, she and I. Door gave on to a lane running up into the Penny Green road. She tried at him again, gently, very tenderly, "Marko, Marko, dear." Would have made your heart squirm. I tried at him: "Now, then, old man." Swung round on us. "Let me alone. Get away. Get right away from me!"

Followed him, the pair of us, up to the main road. She tried again. I tried. He swung round and faced us. "Let me alone. Won't any one let me alone? Get right away from me. Look here. Look here. If you want to do anything for me, get right away from me and leave me alone. Leave me alone. Do you hear? Leave me alone."

Hobbled away out toward Penny Green, bobbing along on his stick fast as he could go.

She said to me, "Oh! oh!" and began to cry. I said I thought the best thing was to leave him for a bit and that I'd go over, or she could, or both of us, a bit later on. Clear we were only driving him mad by following him now. There was a cab came prowling by. I gave the chap a pound note and told him to follow Sabre. "Get up just alongside and keep there," I said. "He'll likely get in. Get him in and take him up to Crawshaws, Penny Green, and come back to me at the Royal Hotel and there's another quid for you."

Old man I went along to the Royal with this Lady Tybar and she began to talk to me. Talk to me. . . . I tell you what I thought about that woman while she talked. I thought, leaving out lime-light beauty, and classic beauty and all that, because it wasn't there, I thought she was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. Yes, and I told my wife so. That shows you! You couldn't say where it was or how it was. You could only say that beauty abode in her face as the scent in the rose. It's there and it's exquisite: that's all you can say. If she'd been talking to me in the dark, I could have *felt* she was beautiful.

That cabman I'd got hold of sent in a while after to see me. Said he'd picked up Sabre a mile along and taken him home. Stopped a bit to patch up some harness or something and "All of a heap" (as he expressed it) Sabre had come flying out of the house again and into the cab and told him to drive like hell and all to the office—to Fortune, East & Sabre's. Said Sabre behaved all the way as if he was mad—shouting to him to hurry and carrying on inside the cab so the old man was terrified.

I said: "To the office! What the devil now?" I ran in to Lady Tybar and we hurried round. We were scared for him, I tell you. And we'd reason to be—when we got there and found him.

WHEN that cab which Hapgood had despatched after Sabre from the coroner's court overtook its quest, the driver put himself abreast of the distracted figure furiously hobbling along the road and, his second pound note in view, began, in a fat and comfortable voice, a beguiling monologue of "Keb, sir? Keb? Keb? Keb, sir?"

Sabre at first gave no attention. Farther along he once angrily waved his stick in signal of dismissal. About a mile along his disabled knee and all his much overwrought body refused further to be the flogged slave of his tumultuous mind. He stopped in physical exhaustion and rested upon his stick. The cabman also stopped and tuned afresh his enticing and restful rhythm: "Keb, sir? Keb? Keb, sir?"

He got in.

He did not think to give a direction, but the driver had his direction; nor, when he was set down at his house, to make payment; but payment had been made. The driver assisted him from the cab and into his door—and he needed assistance—and being off his box set himself to the adjustment of a buckle, repair of which he had deferred until (being a man economical of effort) some other circumstance should necessitate his coming to earth.

Sabre stumbled into his house and pushed the door behind him with a resolution expressive of his desire to shut away from himself all creatures of the world and be alone—be left entirely alone. By habit he climbed the stairs to his room. He collapsed into a chair.

His head was not aching; but there throbbed within his head, ceaselessly and enormously, a pulse that seemed to shake him at its every beat. It was going knock, knock, knock! He began to have the feeling that if this frightful knocking continued it would beat its way out. Something would give way. Amidst the purposeful reveberations his mind, like one squeezed back in the dark corner of a lair of beasts, crouched shaking and appalled. He was the father of Effie's child; he was the murderer of Effie and of her child. He was neither; but the crimes were fastened upon him as ineradicable pigment upon his skin. He was a betrayer and a murderer and every refutation that he could produce turned to a brand in his hands and branded him yet more deeply.

He writhed in torment. Forever, in every hour of every day and night, he would carry the memory of that fierce and sweating face pressing toward him across the table in that court. No! It was another face that passed before that passionate countenance and stood like flame before his eyes. Twyning, Twyning, Twyning, Twyning! The prompter, the goader of that passionate man's passion, the instigator and instrument of this his utter and appalling destruction. Twyning, Twyning, Twyning! He ground his teeth upon the name. He twisted in his chair upon the thought. Twyning, Twyning, Twyning! Knock, knock, knock! Ah, that knocking, that knocking! Something was going to give way in a minute. It must be abated. It must. Something would give way else.

A feverish desire to smoke came upon him. He felt in his pockets for his cigaret-case. He had not got it. He thought after it. He remembered that he had started for Brighton without it, discovered there that he had left it behind. He started to hunt for it. It must be in this room. It was not to be seen in the room. Where? He remembered a previous occasion of searching for it like this. When? Ah, when Effie had told him she had found it lying about and had put it—of all absurd places for a cigaret-case—in the back of the clock. Ten to one she had put it there again now. The very last thing she had done for him! Effie! He went quickly to the clock and opened it. Good! It was there. He snatched it up. Something else there. A folded paper. His name penciled on it: Mr. Sabre.

She had left a message for him!

She had left a message for him! That cigaret-case business had been deliberately done!

He fumbled the paper open. He could not control his fingers. He fumbled it open. He began to read. Tears stood in his eyes. Pitiful, oh, pitiful! He turned the page. Knock, knock, knock! The knocking suddenly ceased. He threw up his hand. He gave a very loud cry. A single note. A note of extraordinary exultation: "Ha!"

He crushed the paper between his hands. He cried aloud: "Into my hands! Into my hands thou hast delivered him!"

He opened the paper and read again, his hand shaking, and now a most terrible trembling upon him.

DEAR MR. SABRE:

I wanted you to go to Brighton so I could be alone to do what I am just going to do. I see now it is all impossible, and I ought to have seen it before, but I was so very fond of my little baby and I never dreamt it would be like this. But you see they won't let me keep my little baby and now I have made things too terrible for you. So I see the only thing to do is to take myself out of it all and take my little baby with me. Soon I shall explain things to God and then I think it will be quite all right. Dear Mr. Sabre, when I explain things to God I shall tell him how wonderful you have been to me. My heart is filled with gratitude to you. I can not express it; but I shall tell God when I explain everything to him; and my one hope is that after I have been punished I shall be allowed to meet you again and thank you—there, where everything will be understood.

He turned the page.

I feel I ought to tell you now, before I leave this world, what I never was able to tell you or any one. The father of my little baby was Harold Twyning, who used to be in your office. We had been secretly engaged a very, very long time and then he was in an officer's training-camp at Bournemouth where I was, and I don't think I quite understood. We were going to be married, and then he had to go suddenly, and then he was afraid to tell his father, and then this happened and he was more afraid. So that was how it all was. I do want you, please, to tell Harold that I quite forgive him, only I can't quite write to him. And, dear Mr. Sabre, I do trust you to be with Harold what you have always been with me and with everybody—gentle and understanding things. And I shall tell the Perches, too, about you, and Mr. Fargus. Good-by, and may God bless and reward you for ever and ever. Effie.

HE SHOUTED again: "Ha!" He cried again: "Into my hands! Into my hands!"

He abandoned himself to a rather horrible ecstasy of hate and passion. His face became rather horrible to see. His face became purple and black and knotted, and the veins on his forehead black. He cried aloud: "Harold! Harold! Twyning! Twyning!" He rather horribly mimicked Twyning. "Harold's such a good boy! Harold's such a good, Christian, model boy! Harold's never said a bad word or had a bad thought. Harold's such a good boy." He cried: "Harold's such a blackguard! Harold's such a blackguard! A blackguard and the son of a vile, infamous, lying, perjured blackguard."

His passion and his hate surmounted his voice. He choked. He picked up his stick and went with frantic striding hops to the door. He cried aloud, gritting his teeth upon it: "I'll cram the letter down his throat. I'll cram the letter down his throat. I'll take him by the neck. I'll *bash* him across the face. And I'll cram the letter down his throat."

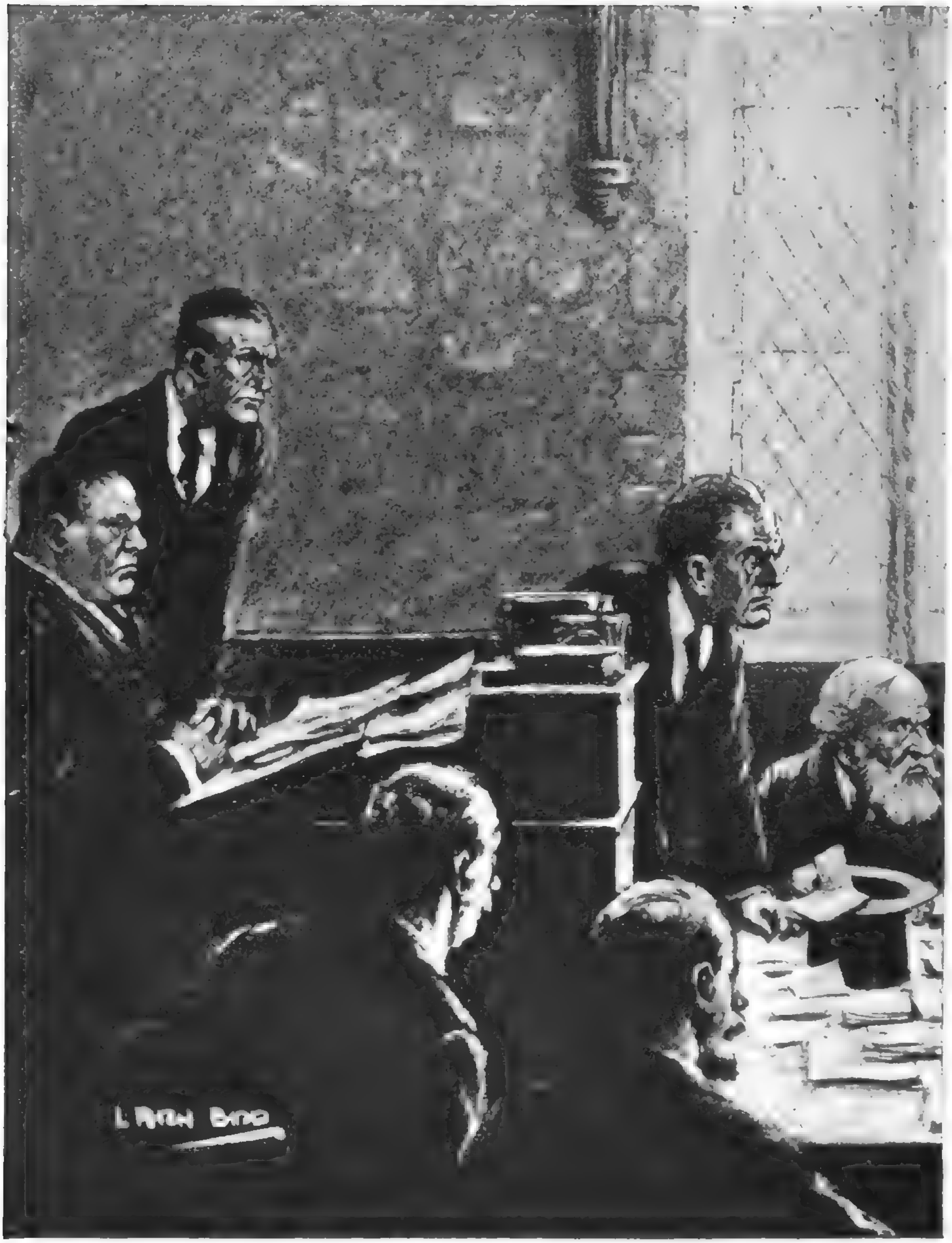
The cab-driver, his labor upon the buckle finished, was resting on his box with the purposeful and luxurious rest of a man who has borne the heat and burden of the day. Sabre waved his stick at him, and shouted to him: "Fortune's office in Tidborough. Hard as you can. Hard as you can." He wrenched open the door and got in. In a moment, the startled horse scarcely put into motion by its startled driver, he put his head and arm from the window and was out on the step. "Stop! Stop! Let me out. I've something to get."

He ran again into the house and bundled himself up the stairs and into his room. At his bureau he took a drawer and wrenched it open so that it came out in his hand, swung on the sockets of its handle, and scattered its contents upon the floor. One article fell heavily. His service revolver. He grabbed it up and dropped on his hands and knees, padding eagerly about after scattered cartridges. As he searched his voice went harshly: "He's hounded me to hell. At the very gates of hell I've got him, *got* him, and I'll have him by his throat and *hurl* him in!" He broke open the breech and jammed the cartridges in, counting them: "One, two, three, four, five, six!" He snapped up the breech and jammed the revolver in his jacket pocket. He went scrambling again down the stairs and as he scrambled down he cried: "I'll cram the letter down his throat. I'll take him by the neck. I'll *bash* him across the face. And I'll cram the letter down his throat. When he's sprawling, when he's choking, perhaps I'll out with my gun and drill him, drill him for the dog that he is."

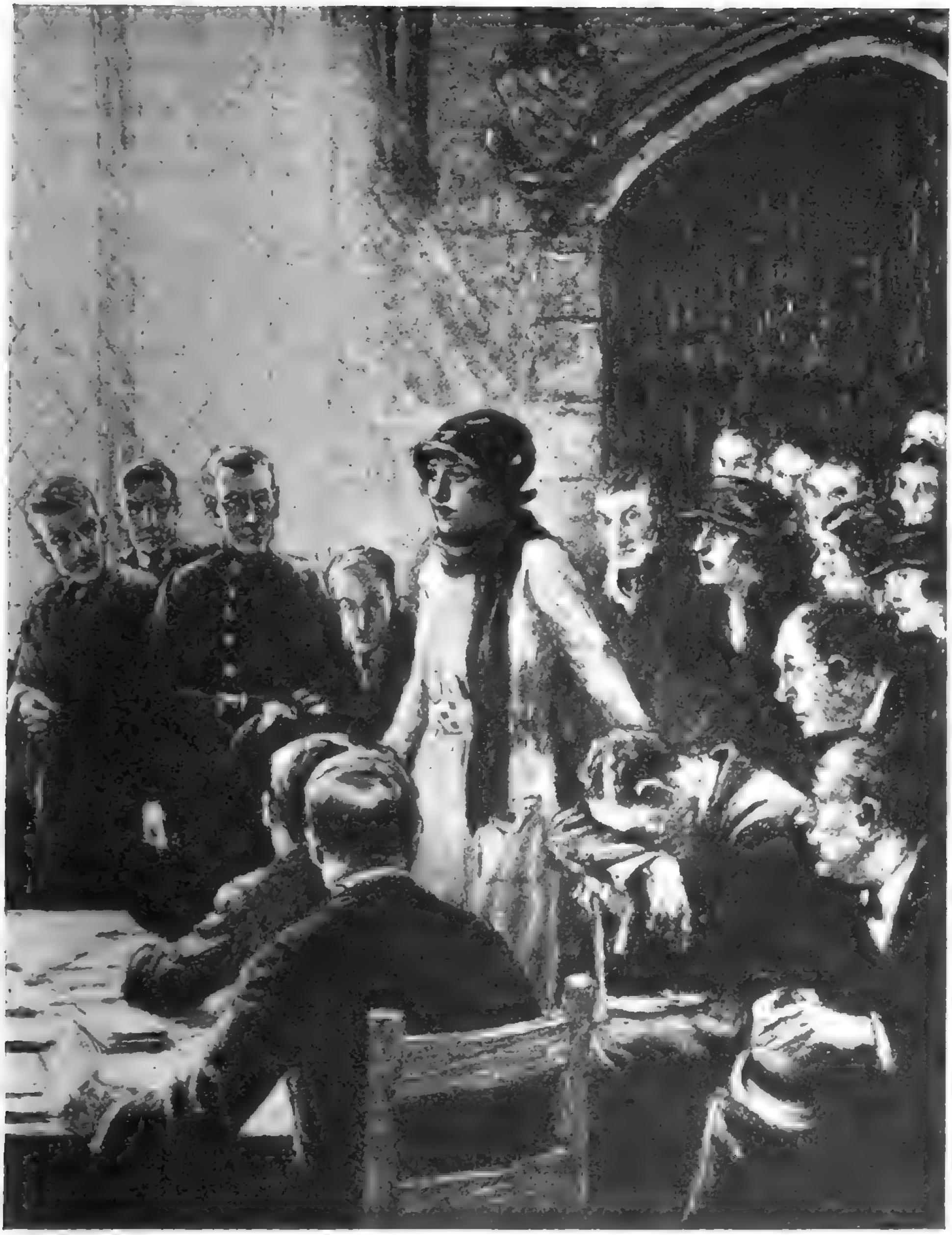
All the way down as the cab proceeded he alternated between shouted behests to the driver to hurry and repetition of his ferocious intention. Over and over again, gritting his teeth upon it, picturing it, in vision acting it so that the perspiration streamed upon his body. "I'll cram the letter down his throat. I'll take him by the neck. I'll *bash* him across the face, and I'll cram the letter down his throat." Over and over again; visioning it; in his mind, and with all his muscles working, ferociously performing it. He felt immensely well. He felt enormously fit. The knocking was done in his brain. His mind was tingling clear.

He was arrived! He was here! "Into

Everybody's Magazine, July, 1921



A woman pressed out from the mob behind and walked up the court like a goddess, like Lady Tybar. Every one knows me here. I've just come in . . . just heard this shameful tell you before all this court, and you may take what steps you like, I tell you that Sabre, and stooped over him and touched



Portia, by Jove, like Euphrosyne. "Let no one dare to touch me," she said. "I am business; all of you killing him among you." She turned to Twyning. "And you, I you are a liar, an experienced and calculating liar." And she went with that to old him with her hands, and said "Marko! Marko!"

my hands! Into my hands!" He passed into the office and swiftly as he could go up the stairs. He encountered no one. He came to Twyning's door and put his hands upon the latch. Immediately, and enormously, so that for a moment he was forced to pause, the pulse broke out anew in his head. Knock, knock, knock! Knock, knock, knock! Curse the thing! Never mind. In! In! At him! At him!

He went in.

ON HIS right, as he entered, a fire was burning in the grate. It struck him, with the inconsequent insistence of trifles in enormous issues, how chilly for the time of year the day had been and how icily cold his own house. On his left at the far end of the room Twyning sat at his desk. He was crouched at his desk. His head was buried in his hands. At his elbows, vivid upon the black expanse of the table, lay a torn envelope, dull red.

Sabre shut the door and placed his stick against the wall by the fire. He took the letter from his pocket and walked across and stood over Twyning. Twyning had not heard him. He stood over him and looked down upon him. Knock, knock, knock! Curse the thing! There was Twyning's neck, that brown strip between his collar and his head, that in a minute he would catch him by. No, seated thus he would catch his hair and wrench him back and cram his meal upon him. Knock, knock, knock! Curse the thing!

He said heavily: "Twyning, Twyning, I've come to speak to you about your son."

Twyning slightly twisted his face in his hands so as to glance up at Sabre. His face was red. He said in an odd, thick voice: "Oh, Sabre, Sabre, have you heard?"

Sabre said: "Heard?"

"He's killed. My Harold. My boy. My boy, Harold. Oh Sabre, Sabre, my boy, my boy, my Harold!"

He began to sob; his shoulders heaving.

Sabre gave a sound that was just a whimper. Oh, irony of fate! Oh, cynicism incredible in its malignancy! Oh, cumulative touch! To deliver him thus his enemy to strike, and to present him for the knife thus already stricken!

No sound in all the range of sounds whereby man can express emotion was possible to express this emotion that now surcharged him. This was no pain of man's devising. This was a special and a private agony of the gods reserved for victims approved for very nice and exquisite experiments. He felt himself squeezed right down beneath a pressure squeezing to his vitals; and there was squeezed out of him just a whimper.

He walked across to the fireplace; and on the high mantelshelf laid his arms and bowed his forehead to the marble.

Twyning was brokenly saying: "It's good of you to come, Sabre. I feel it. After that business. I'm sorry about it, Sabre. I feel your goodness coming to me like this. But you know, you always knew, what my boy was to me. My Harold! My Harold! Such a good boy, Sabre! Such a good, Christian boy! And now he's gone, he's gone. Never to see him again! My boy! My son! My son!"

Oh, dreadful. . . .

And he went on, distraught and pitiable. "My boy! My Harold! Such a good boy, Sabre! Such a perfect boy! My Harold!"

The letter was crumpled in Sabre's right hand. He was constricting it in his hand and knocking his clenched knuckles on the marble.

"My boy! My dear, good boy! Oh, Sabre, Sabre!"

He dropped his right arm and swung it by his side, to and fro, over the fender—over the fire, over the hearth—over the flames.

"My Harold! Never to see his face again! My Harold!"

He stopped his swinging arm, holding his hand above the flames. "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him; for God *is* love." He opened his fingers and the crumpled letter fell and was consumed. He pushed himself up from the mantelpiece and turned and went over to Twyning and stood over him again. He patted Twyning's heaving shoulders: "There, there, Twyning. Bad luck. Bad luck. Hard. Hard. Bear up, Twyning. Soldier's death. Finest death. Died for his country. Fine boy. Soldier's death. Bad luck. Bad luck, Twyning."

Twyning, inarticulate, pushed up his hand and felt for Sabre's hand and clutched it and squeezed it convulsively.

Sabre said again: "There, there, Twyning. Hard. Hard. Fine death. Brave boy." He disengaged his hand and turned and walked very slowly from the room.

He went along the passage, past Mr. Fortune's door toward that which had been his own, still walking very slowly and with his hand against the wall to steady himself. He felt deathly ill.

He went into his own room, unentered by him for many months, now his own room no more, and dropped heavily into the familiar chair at the familiar desk. He put his arms out along the desk and laid down his head upon them. Oh, cumulative touch! He began to be shaken with onsets of emotion. Oh, cumulative touch!

The communicating door opened and Mr. Fortune appeared. He stared at Sabre in astounded indignation. "Sabre! You here! I must say—I must admit——"

Sabre clutched up his dry and terrible sobbing. He turned swiftly and put his hands on the arms of the chair to rise.

A curious look came upon his face. He said: "I say, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I—I can't get up."

Mr. Fortune boomed: "Can't get up!"

"I say—No. I say, I think something's happened to me. I can't get up."

The door opened. Hapgood came in, and Nona.

Sabre said: "I say, Hapgood. Nona—Nona! I say, Nona, I think something's happened to me. I can't get up."

A change came over his face. He collapsed back in the chair.

"Marko! Marko!"

She who thus cried ran forward and threw herself on her knees beside him, her hands stretched up to him.

Hapgood turned furiously on Mr. Fortune. "Go for a doctor! Go like hell! Sabre! Sabre, old man!"

* * * *

"Hemorrhage on the brain," said the doctor. "Well, if there's no more effusion of blood. You quite understand me. I say *if* there isn't. Has he been through any trouble, any kind of strain?"

"Trouble," said Hapgood. "Strain. He's been in hell—right in."

* * * *

When he was removed and they had left him, Nona said to Hapgood as they came down the steps of the County Hospital: "There was a thing he was so fond of, Mr. Hapgood.

—"O Wind,
"If winter comes, can spring be far behind?"

"It comes to me now. There must be a turning now. If he dies—still, a turning."

HAPGOOD, across the coffee-cups, the liqueur-glasses and the cigarets, wagged a solemn head at that friend of his, newly returned from a long visit to America. He wagged a solemn head:

She's got her divorce, that wife of his. . . .

Eh? Well, man alive, where do you expect me to begin? You insinuate yourself into a government commission to go to America to lecture with your "Sketch-book on the Western Front," and I write you about six letters to every one I get out of you, and you come back and expect me to give you a complete social and political and military record of everything that's happened in your absence. Can't you *read?*

Well, have it your own way. I've told you in my letters how he went on after that collapse, that brain hemorrhage. I told you we got Ormond Clive on to him. I told you we got him up here eventually to Clive's own nursing home in Welbeck Place. Clive was a friend of that Lady Tybar. She was with Sabre all the time he was in Queer Street—and it *was* queer, I give you my word. Pretty well every day I'd look in. Every day she'd be there. Every day Ormond Clive would come. Time and again we'd stand around the bed, we three, watching. Impenetrable and extraordinary business! There was his body, alive, breathing. His mind, his consciousness, his ego, his self, his whatever you like to call it—not there; away; absent. Not in that place. Departed into, and occupied in, that mysterious valley where those cases go.

What was he doing there? What was he seeing there? What was he thinking there? Was he in touch with this that belonged to him here? Was he sitting in some fastness, dark and infinitely remote, and trying to rid himself of this that belonged to him here? Was he trying to get back to it, to resume habitation and possession and command? It was rummy. It was eery. It was creepy. It was like staring down into a dark pit and hearing little tinkling sounds of some one moving there, and wondering what the devil he was up to. Yes, it was creepy. . . .

Process of time he began to come back. He'd struck a light down there, as you might say, and you could see the dim, mysterious glimmer of it, moving about, imperceptibly coming up the side. Now brighter, now fainter; now here, now there. Rummy, I can tell you. But he was *coming up*. He was climbing up out of that place where he had been. What would he remember? Yes, and what was he coming up to?

What was he coming up to? That was what began to worry me. This divorce suit of his wife's was climbing up to its place in the list. He was climbing up out of the place where he had been and this case was climbing up toward hearing. Do you get me? Do you get my trouble? Soon as his head emerged up out of the pit was he going to be bludgeoned down into it again by going through in the Divorce Court precisely that which had bludgeoned him down at the inquest? Was I going to get the case held up so as to keep him for that? Or what was I going to do? I hadn't been instructed to prepare his defense. At Brighton, when I'd suggested it, he'd told me, politely, to go to hell. I hadn't been instructed; no one had been instructed. And there was no defense to prepare. There was only his bare word, only his flat denial—denial flat, unprofitable, and totally unsupported. The only person who could support it was the girl and she was dead.

She was much worse than dead: She had died in atrocious circumstances his part in which had earned him the severe censure of the coroner's jury. His defense couldn't have been worse. He'd tied himself in damning knots ever since he'd first set eyes on the girl, and all he could bring to untie them was simply to say: "It wasn't so." His defense was as bad as if he were to stand up before the Divorce Court and say: "Before she died the girl wrote and signed a statement exonerating me and fixing the paternity on So-and-so. He's dead, too, that So-and-so, and as for her signed statement I'm sorry to say I destroyed it, forgetting I should need it in this suit. I was worried about something else at the time and I quite forgot this and I destroyed it."

I don't say his defense would be quite so crudely insulting to the intelligence of the court as that; but I say the whole unsupported twisting and turning and writhing and wriggling of it was not far short of it.

Well, that was how I figured it out to my-myself in those days as the case came along for hearing; and I said to myself: Was I going to put in affidavits for a stay of hearing for the pleasure of seeing him nursed back to life to go through that agony and ordeal of the inquest again and come out with the same result as if he hadn't been there at all? And I decided no; no thanks; not me. It was too much like patching up a dying man in a civilized country for the pleasure of hanging him, or like fatting up a starving man in a cannibal country for the satisfaction of eating him.

And I had this. In further support of my position I had this. My friend, the Divorce Court is a cynical institution. If a respondent and a corespondent have been in places and in circumstances where they might have incriminated themselves, the Divorce Court cynically assumes that, being human, they would have incriminated themselves. "But," it says to the petitioner, "I want proof, definite and satisfactory proof, of those places and of those circumstances. That's what I want. That's what you've got to give me."

Very well. Listen to me attentively. Lend me your ears. The onus of that proof rests on the petitioner. Because a case is undefended it doesn't for one single shadow of a chance follow that the petitioner's plea is therefore going to be granted. No. The Divorce Court may be cynical, but it's a stickler for proof. The Divorce Court says to the petitioner: "It's up to you. Prove it. Never mind what the other side isn't here to deny. What you've got to do is to satisfy me, to prove to me that these places and these circumstances were so. Go ahead. Satisfy me—if you can."

So I said to myself: Now the places and the circumstances of this petition unquestionably were so. All the Sabres in the world couldn't deny that. Let his wife go ahead and prove them to the satisfaction of the court, if she can. If she can't, good! No harm done that he wasn't there to be bludgeoned anew. If she can satisfy the court, well, I say to you, my friend, as I said then to myself, and I say it deliberately: "If she *can* satisfy the court, good again;

better, excellent. He's free. He's free from a bond intolerable to both of them."

Right. The hearing came on just the other day, and his wife did satisfy the court. She got her decree. He's free. That's that. . . .

Yesterday I took my courage in both hands and told him. Yesterday Ormond Clive said Sabre might be cautiously approached about things. For three weeks past Clive's not let us—me or that Lady Tybar—see him. Yesterday we were permitted again; and I took steps to be there first. I told him. There was one thing I'd rather prayed for to help me in the telling, and it came off—he didn't remember! He'd come out of that place where he had been with only a confused recollection of all that had happened to him before he went in. Like a fearful nightmare that in the morning one remembers only vaguely and in bits. Vaguely and in bits he remembered the inquest horror, and vaguely and in bits he remembered the divorce—and he thought the one was as much over as the other. He thought he had been divorced. I said to him, taking it as the easiest way of breaking my news, I said to him; "You know your wife's divorced you, old man?" He said painfully, "Yes, I know. I remember that."

I could have stood on my head and waved my heels with relief and joy. Of course it will come back to him in time that the business hadn't happened before his illness. In time he'll begin to grope after detailed recollection and he'll begin to realize that he never did go through it and that it must have happened while he was ill. Well, I don't funk that. That won't happen yet a while; and when it does happen I'm confident enough that something else will have happened meanwhile and that he'll see, and thank God for it, that what is is best. What do I mean? What will have happened meanwhile? Well, that's telling; and I don't feel it's quite mine to tell. Tell you what, you come around and have a look at the old chap to-morrow. I dare bet he'll be on the road toward it by then and perhaps tell us himself. As I was coming away yesterday I passed that Lady Tybar going in, and I told her what I'd been saying to him and what he remembered and what he didn't remember. What's that got to do with it? Well, you wait and see, my boy. You wait and see. I'll tell you this—come on, let's be getting off to this play or we'll be late—I tell you this, it's my belief of old Sabre that after all he's been through:

Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill,

or jolly soon will be. And good luck to him. He's won out.

SABRE, after Hapgood on the visit on which he had begun "to tell him things," had left him, was sitting propped up in bed awaiting who next might come. The nurse had told him he was to have visitors that morning. He sat as a man might sit at daybreak brooding down upon a valley whence slowly the veiling mists dissolved. There were becoming apparent to him familiar features about the landscape. He was as one returned after long absence to his native village and wondering to find forgotten things again, paths he had walked, scenes he had viewed, places and people left long ago and still enduring here. More than that—he was to go among them.

The door opened and one came in. Nona.

She said to him, "Marko!"

He had no reply that he could make.

She slipped a fur that she was wearing and came and sat down beside him. She wore what he would have thought of as a kind of waistcoat thing, cut like his own waistcoats, but short; and opened above like a waistcoat but turned back in a white rolled edging, revealing all her throat. She had a little close-fitting hat banded with flowers and a loose veil depended from it. She put back the veil. Beauty abode in her face as the scent within the rose, Hapgood had said; and, as perfume deeply inhaled, her serene and tender beauty penetrated Sabre's senses, propped up, watching her. He had something to say to her.

"How long is it since I have seen you, Nona?"

"It's a month since I was here, Marko."

"I don't remember it."

"You've been very ill; oh, so ill."

He said slowly: "Yes, I think I've been down in a pretty deep place."

"You're going to be splendid now, Marko."

He did not respond to her tone. He said: "I've come on a lot in the past few weeks. I'd an idea you'd been about me before that. I'd an idea you'd be coming again. There's a thing I've been thinking out to tell you."

She breathed: "Yes, tell me, Marko."

But he did not answer.

She said: "Have you been thinking, in these weeks, while you've been coming on, what you are going to do?"

His hands, that had been crumpling up the sheet, were now laid flat before him. His eyes, that had been regarding her, were now averted from her, fixed ahead. "There is nothing I can do, in the way you mean."

She was silent a little time.

"Marko, we've not talked at all about the greatest thing—of course they've told you—the armistice; the war won. England, your England that you loved so, at peace, victorious; those dark years done. England her own again. Your dear England, Marko."

He said: "It's no more to do with me. Frightful things have happened to me. Frightful things."

She stretched a hand to his. He moved his hands away. "Marko, they're done. I would not have spoken of them. But shall I? Your dear England in those years suffered frightful things. She suffered lies, calumnies, hateful and terrible things—not in one little place, but across the world. Those who loved her trusted her and she has come through those dark years; and those who know you have trusted you *always*, and you are coming through those days to show to all. Time, Marko; time heals all things, forgets all things, and proves all things. There's that for you."

He shook his head with a quick, decisive motion.

She went on: "There's your book—your 'England.' You have that to go to now. And all your plans—do you remember telling me all your plans? Such splendid plans. And first of all your 'England' that you loved writing so."

He said: "It can't be. It can't be."

She began again to speak. He said: "I don't want to hear those things. They're done. I don't want to be told those things. They had nothing to do with me."

She tried to present to him indifferent subjects for his entertainment. She could not get him to talk any more. Presently she said, with a movement, "I am not to stay with you very long."

He then aroused himself and spoke and had a firmness in his voice: "And I'll tell you this," he said: "This was what I said I had to tell you. When you go, you are not to return. I don't want to see you again."

She drew a breath, steadying herself: "Why not, Marko?"

"Because what's been has been. Done. I've been through frightful things. They're on me still. They always will be on me. But from everything that belongs to them I want to get right away. And I'm going to."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. Only get right away."

She got up. "Very well. I understand." She turned away. "It grieves me, Marko. But I understand. I've always understood you." She turned again and came close to him. "That's what you're going to do. Do you know what I'm going to do?"

He shook his head. He was breathing deeply.

"I'm going to do what I ought to have done the minute I came into the room. I hadn't quite the courage. This."

She suddenly stooped over him. She encircled him with her arms and slightly raised him to her. She put her lips to his and kissed him and held him so.

"You are never going to leave me, Marko. Never, never, never, till death."

He cried, "Beloved! Beloved!" and clung to her. "Beloved! Beloved!" and clung to her.

Postscript. This went through the mail bearing postmark September, 1919:

"And seeing in the picture newspaper photograph with printing called 'Lady Tybar, widow of the late Lord Tybar, V. C., who is marrying Mr. Mark Sabre' and never having been in comfortable situation since leaving Penny Green, have expected you might be wishing for cook and house-parlormaid as before and would be most pleased and obliged to come to you, which if you did not remember us at first were always called by you hi! Jinks and lo! Jinks, and no offense ever taken as knowing it was only your way and friendly. And so will end now and hoping you may take us and oblige, your obedient servant, SARAH JINKS (HI!)
"REBECCA JINKS (LO!)"

Kifaru

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Author of "Pinion and Paw," "Snapshots of the Wild," etc.

Illustrated by Joseph Coll

THE trouble began over the fires. I am almost certain it was the fires—the little winking camp-fires defying so insolently the black pall of night. One must admit it seemed a small excuse to begin hostilities upon; but wars have been started over less before now. Anyhow—there were the fires. There was Kifaru, bang in the middle of 'em, without warning; and his declaration of war and his attack in person arrived simultaneously.

Of course the *askaris*, or black guards, were asleep, being specially paid to keep awake. Equally, of course, the fires were nearly out, special orders being to keep them alight. Wherefore the first thing any living soul in camp—white hunters, *askaris*, and some fifty porters—knew about the existence even, much less the proximity, of Kifaru was his single, terrifying snort, delivered like a blast of hissing steam—smack bang in their midst.

A bomb could not have had more effect.

That was no moment to complain of heavy sleepers. The heaviest and the lightest awoke in the same instant. There was that in Kifaru's snort that demanded instant and complete attention: like the hiss of a snake, it possessed that terrifying quality that could not be ignored. To that end it was perhaps designed—a danger-signal for any whom it might concern.

Being on, or near, the ground, all eyes, waking at once, beheld Kifaru standing apparently above them—huge, it seemed, as a Brontosaurus. That was a trick of the smoldering embers, perhaps, which bewitched the dark. (We know how it may be thus in our own firelit room.)

Not that Kifaru needed magnifying at all, his actual, or daylight, proportions being quite startling enough. With a five-foot-nine-inch height, he boasted a length of thirteen feet. His chest nine feet one inch—unexpanded, I make no doubt—and his long, long head was about four feet five and one-quarter inches round. His "armed snout" boasted two horns atop; the front, and longer, a full yard of spiked death, two feet three and one-quarter inches round at base; the second twelve and one-quarter inches long, and twenty inches in girth at base. If, however, mere measurements convey little of the monstrous truth, his weight will supply the crowning touch—somewhere about three tons, I shouldn't wonder.

Of course Kifaru was a rhinoceros, of the prehensile-lipped persuasion, which is a two-horned rhino, which is a black rhinoceros, which is—in museums and such-like—*rhinoceros bicornis*, so that's that.

Then did that camp boil. All the *askaris'* rifles went off at once, of course. Equally, of course, they endangered everybody's life except Kifaru's. The *askaris*, also, went off at once. Fifty porters rose up like one man, yelling, and fell over one another. Some genius shouted, "Put out the fires!" Another made a fire up. All the ground seemed to get up and tumble about. And seven donkeys, one mule and two horses stampeding did not quieten things very much. The noise was beyond asylums. Kifaru had brought down one white hunter's tent in his first rush; the stifled remarks from beneath sounded like a distant riot. The other white man, roaring for his rifle, was just in time to see Kifaru tossing the stores piled in front of the tents generously into the night. It sounded not unlike a railway accident. Naturally, one case of express-rifle cartridges fell into a fire. It fell from some height, and split in halves neatly like a walnut. The Brock's benefit that followed was thrilling, and the vicinity of that precise fire became empty of human beings for quite some considerable radius.

Then the one white man not wriggling like a demon caterpillar under a collapsed tent put a revolver bullet—.380 bore, it was—into Kifaru's battle-ship-like stern, and although it did not check that monster's maneuvering power, it hurt his feelings and he retired into the night, screaming like all the pig-pens of Chicago stock-yards; not a snort less. And the only case of medical comforts within one hundred and fifty miles went with him, impaled upon his front horn and scenting the night like a chemist's shop.

Half a mile from the center of tumult, Kifaru—whose walk was a Marathon one—stopped in the echoing, immemorial loneliness of the wilderness night, and got rid of the incubus of the medical-case upon a ten-foot ant-heap. Thereafter, he began supper on a four-inch-thorned mimosa bush, chewing twigs and leaves and thorns with machine-like indifference; but broke off to move out on to the open veld, where he appeared to graze, but searched really, with his prehensile upper lip, for a very small shrub that usually tickled his mighty palate.

Somehow to-night, however, loneliness assailed Kifaru—it can not have been the revolver bullet, because it had in part contributed to his attack upon the camp. Nor did anything suffice. He broke off eating to jump into a most unexpectedly easy trot, that became a gallop of equally surprising speed—all simply out of cussedness, to upset the stalk of a lion after zebra he had scented a quarter of a mile away. Yet he had—to his enormous horns this may be attributed—utterly failed to see two hunting leopards or chetahs feeding upon a hen ostrich twenty yards from him before he started.

The excitement, however, accomplished nothing. The burst of temper—never sweet at the best of times—had only served to awaken a worse.

Kifaru stopped and peered around with his little pig's eyes, and short pig's tail stuck up at one end as straight as his horns at the other end, and the whole moonlit wonderland became distasteful to him. He, who had lived in this wild place for the *bon Dieu* knows how many years, now felt alone, alone among teeming thousands of feathered and furred wild kindred—alone because he was the only rhinoceros. At least, he was the only rhinoceros he had ever met, or scented, or heard; seeing was out of the question unless they had got within ten or fifteen yards of each other. And in that moment the beast's effete, prehistoric mind realized the fact that had taken him all those scores of years to find out: he was alone. He, *R. Bicornis*, wanted another *R. Bicornis* to snort to. Yes, the wanderlust had him by the throat. He must "see behind the ranges"—*must*. Life in that part now *alone* was intolerable without a— Without a what? Without a Madam *R. Bicornis*. That was it! Kifaru was in love, in love with the rhinocerosess he had never seen.

And not all the company of all the zebras, all the ostriches, of all the antelopes, gnu, hartbeest, impalla, eland, oribi, water-buck, or gazelle after their kind, could suffice, or ever would again.

Some of us can sympathize with him; but unlike many, who are not rhinoceroses, Kifaru, at any rate, knew what to do—trek! So he treked. He treked northward through the grim always, and at night the terrible thorn bush.

The spell of the scene lay heavy upon all things, and the stillness—increased, not broken, by the hundred and one little sounds—was the silence of the world when this antediluvian beast's ancestors, in common with elephant and hippopotami, had their "Day." Surreptitious rustlings, sudden startled crashes, swift patterings, snorts, whistles, grunts, or thuds—who knew what sinister or startled shapes they implied? "And who cared?" Kifaru seemed to say, with his gigantic head up, his big fringed ears cocked forward, his restlessly absurd tail cocked high. He did not, anyway—not even for the barbed-wire mimosa, the wait-a-bit thorn, or the acacia, upon whose four and even six inch meat-hooks or straight, spiked skewers you or I would have left all the flesh we owned. Kifaru went through them all with that armor-plated unconcern that can only go with pretty well the thickest hide in nature, and the weight of a steam-roller to back it.

Once, as happened to Tartarin of Tarascon, Kifaru heard lions roar, but it was they, not he, who stood aside, growling in a horribly sinister way among the inky shadows. Once, too, he came upon that last word in agile death, two leopards, with the dam of a zebra foal at bay, and chased them, exploding with snarls, up a Phœnix palm-tree full of bees; and once—ough!—he trod upon a python, fifteen feet long, who, after the unspeakable manner of the serpent, had dined not wisely but too well, and could not, simply could not, get out of the way. It did, however, when Kifaru had done with it, get out of everybody's way for ever.

And all the time Kifaru traveled with his patent India-rubber, steam-press jog-trot that not the roughest of rough ground or the most fearsome of impenetrable thickets seemed able to check, till the great umbrella-like euphorbia trees closed in and marched him solemnly along by the double-troughed, tunnel-like hippopotamus paths to the river. The river slid in the moonlight like a flood of mercury between banks all alive with fireflies, tree-frogs and wheeling, churring nightjars.

NOW it is written that, though they may feed, not even the greatest land animals, the left-overs from the prehistoric, rhinoceros, elephant—but not hippopotamus, for he is a water beast—may drink in safety. Kifaru must have known this; but his size and love had made him arrogant. He drank, and, because his horns seemed always to get in the way of his eyes, he failed to see the quite unimportant little ripple upon the oily current, that may have been the ring of a fish on the rise, or—it may not. Certainly he with the wonderful nose did not fail to note the abominable stench of stale musk that pervaded the air a minute later. He drew back with that amazing agility that is nearly akin to magic with rhinoceroses and elephants; but the quickness of the crocodile's rush was even a quicker miracle.

Twelve feet of corrugated horny armor-plating, two rows of hooked meat-saws, a chaos of flying waters and—the crocodile had got his hold.

Apparently crocodiles do not look before they leap. Equally apparently, having once taken hold, they are either almost physically unable or too cold-blooded to let go.

Certain it is that the saurian's grip upon Kifaru's peculiar twenty-nine-inch three-toed near foreleg seemed as if it were a fixture for good.

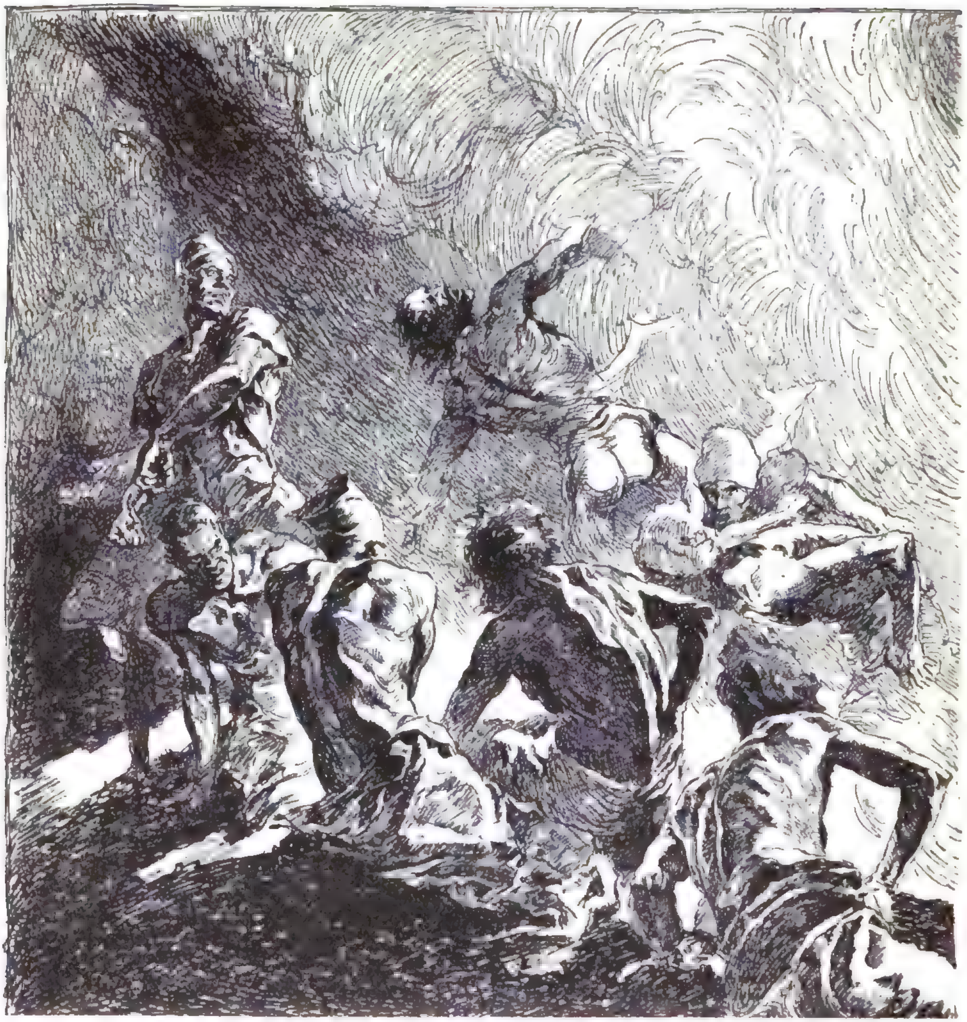
Only one mistake the scaled nightmare made—in the depth of the water. It was shallow under her ponderous belly, and a crocodile not in deep water is robbed of half its terrors. Still, she had quite enough left, and the tug of war that ensued was Titanic.

What might have transpired, what might not have transpired after that no man can say; for, with extraordinary suddenness, and heralded solely by a deep, cavernous grunting comparable only to a fog-horn, some tremendous thing awoke to life and commotion in the forest labyrinths on the top of the river-bank, and charged down the hippo path to the water with not much more noise than a runaway traction engine.

As a matter of fact, it was an old bull hippopotamus, lord of those particular reaches, who, hearing the uproar of the battle, suddenly conceived the notion that enemies were between himself and his beloved deeps. And when a hippo gets that into his slow brain it is all up with any living thing in his path that may not be able to get out of it. Get to the water he will, straight, and in the least possible interval of time. Nothing can stand up to him, and all that he knocks down comes out flat as pancakes.

It was sheer luck that he passed so close to Kifaru as to brush his side, instead of barging clean into and upsetting even the rhino, as he weighed four tons. Then he saw the crocodile, and stopped. He did his stopping as suddenly as he had accomplished his starting.

Of all mammals, the hippopotamus alone seems designed by Nature successfully to cope with the crocodiles—could not live where he does else. Observers seem to have overlooked this fact. One reason, perhaps, for the enormously disproportionate size of the beast's jaws. All his armament is there—tusks thirty inches long and twelve



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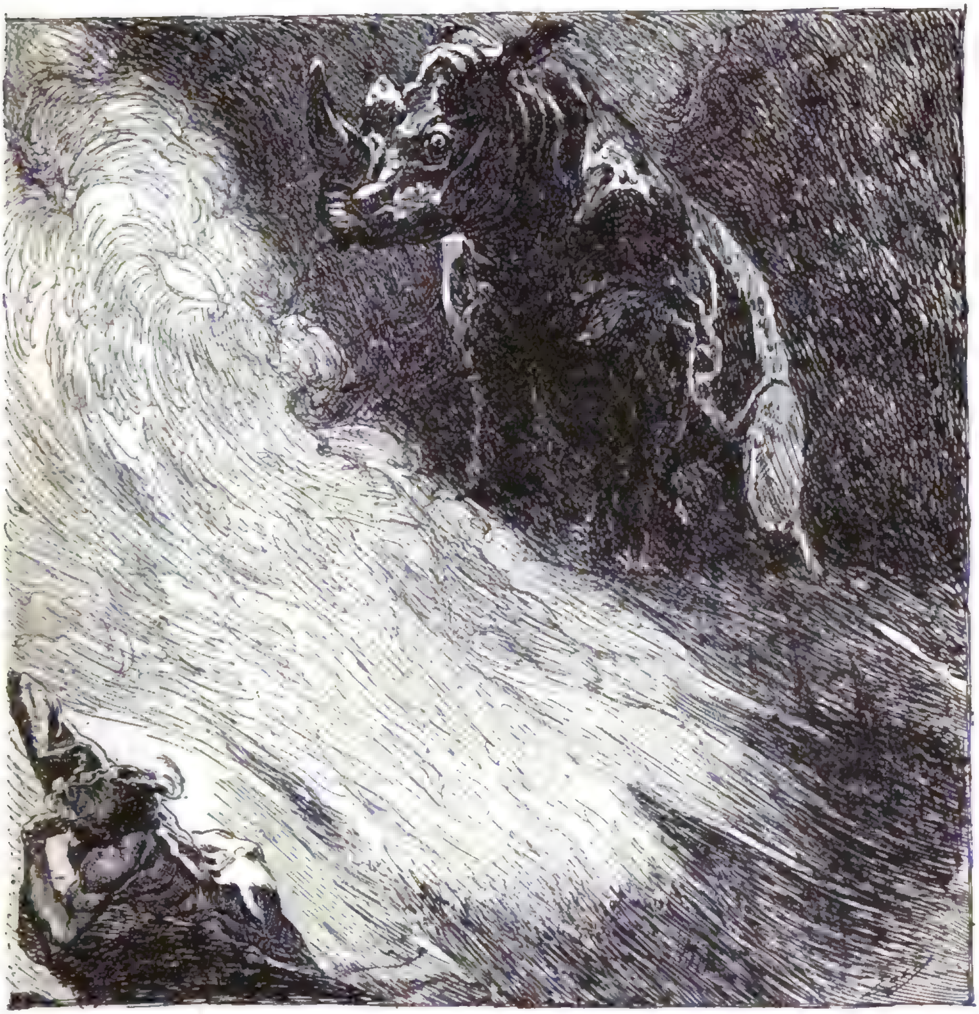
huge teeth in proportion—and a very terrible armament it is, built evidently to face a very terrible adversary. A beast that can scrunch up boats as we scrunch biscuits can not be lightly set aside. Wherefore hippopotami seem to have saurian at a complete understanding. And now, for the first time, the low, crawling thing saw the hippo. Other crocodiles, too, that had gathered like ghouls at the scent of blood, beheld him in the moonlight. They sank backward with prawn-like speed. The inky ripples splashed with silver moonlight sucked over them. They did not reappear.

The big crocodile began to writhe. Surely there was expression at last in those horrible cold eyes—an expression of fear. She seemed to have difficulty in unlocking the vise of her jaws. The lashing of her terrible plated tail whipped the shallows like soda and milk. If Kifaru's brain had not been as slow as the ages from which he was a survival, he would have horned her in her side; but he had no precedent for such a position.

The old bull hippopotamus paused only for a moment. The crocodile was in his path—enough! His jaws opened like an



snort, delivered like a blast of hissing steam—smack bang in their midst. All the *askaris'* rifles went All the ground seemed to get up and tremble about, and the noise was above asylums.

iron-spiked portcullis; a lion, one felt, could have been engulfed therein. His single bass grunt, hollow as the tomb, reverberated from tree-girt bank to bank all down the river. Then—he heaved forward. Followed a geyser of foam and, apparently, a submarine earthquake.

Kifaru backed up the slope, squealing like a shipload of porkers. The hippopotamus passed on straight and unchecked to his secret daylight quarters. Heaven knows what became of the crocodile. She was. She was not. But perhaps the other crocodiles, spread out to bask on the sand-banks next day, might have added, with a wink of a slime-coated horny eyelid, "The rest is—silence."

The sun they keep in those parts to cook the dinner had been blazing down upon the already sizzled-up red scenery for perhaps two hours, and the vultures had disappeared heavenward to do their daily undertakers' stunt, when we discover Kifaru still on the move.

He had traveled about six miles in that time. Not more, because, since he weighed much, he had to eat much, and eat often.

The heat flurry was dancing over against the landscape like the air above a locomotive's funnel, and the dust hung like fog above the restless antelope and zebra herds.

A sun helmet was moving above the tinder-dry grass, and it appeared to be looking for something. It was, as a matter of fact, looking for Kifaru. It had been under the tent that Kifaru knocked down the night before. Yet it was within fifty yards of the mighty one before it realized that he was not a huge mound of earth.

About this time, the two native trackers with the helmet, who had alone made the finding of Kifaru possible, developed the climbing powers of monkeys into the nearest trees. The helmet and its black gun-bearer with the heavy rifle completed the approach alone.

So big was the helmet that one had difficulty in discovering the white hunter beneath. It looked like a nightmare mushroom. Still it seemed impossible that the rhinoceros should fail to discover him even when he approached to within twenty yards, moving up wind of course.

About this time the gun-bearer also took the ape-route to a tree, and of course forgot to leave the heavy rifle behind him. Also some starling-like birds on and about Kifaru who had been relieving him of insect pests gratuitously, began to shoot and crash about in the air, trying to warn him.

Kifaru, with his long, long head up, was browsing, via his prehensile lip, upon leaves and twigs and thorns. Imagination reels to think what the inside of his mouth must have been like. Eating packing-needles was scarcely in it. Out of the compost mixed and chewed up he appeared miraculously to generate enjoyment and nourishment.

The hunter raised his light .275 magazine rifle, and aimed 'twixt little eye and big ear. The report that followed seemed to outrage the sublime stillness of centuries, and set the game thundering away out on the plains yonder under whirling dust clouds. All the trees and bushes and grass seemed to hurl forth birds. And Kifaru—Kifaru never moved! Never moved, I tell you. He remained there with that colossal head of his up, as utterly indifferent and motionless as if he were posing for one of those Nature photographer's pictures.

Then the white hunter backed off a bit—it may have been ten paces—and fired for the heart. By this time he had felt behind him for his heavy rifle, and found it not. But it did not seem to matter very much, for Kifaru went down as if he had been struck by lightning—rigid.

I guess that last point ought to have put that white hunter wise to the truth, but it did not. He started to approach the huge mass in the grass, sort of rubbing his hands at the length of the horn trophy he had captured. Then he—he did not!

The alacrity with which these great pachyderms can hoist their tons weight on to their feet is only exceeded by the speed with which they can—charge! And Kifaru did all these things between the time you could draw one breath and the next.

I said that he had fallen rigid. That showed that the bullet, being aimed for the heart, naturally struck inches above where it should have gone and jarred the spine, inducing temporary stunning. His motionlessness at the first shot showed that the bullet had flown over his head. Perhaps a gun-bearer, or some clutching branch belike, had been fooling with the rifle sights.

THE white hunter who had got himself one hundred yards away in haste, fired now as quickly as he could—once. There was no time to shoot twice, Kifaru was on him in ten seconds. The man tried to run to one side, caught his foot in some one of the thousands of foot-entanglements all around, and fell headlong.

Kifaru arrived just as he was struggling to his feet, aimed deliberately, dropped his terrible "armed snout," and still deliberately tossed the luckless one over his head. 'Twas a shocking business throughout.

Then he charged on into the scenery, snorting, rearing, dashing and rushing to right and left; wheeling round as if to meet a following foe, and generally making things hum in his immediate vicinity.

The path that he left was like unto the path of a tank, and the distance that he went seemed as if it never, never was going to come to an end. Presumably that bullet "under the hump" was still rankling on the monster mind as well as in the monster carcass. Anyhow, the other white hunter tracked him ten miles next day, and gave it up.

A river he struck and went through and

out the other side, glistening most wonderfully black in the sun. A marsh he struck, and went through, and out the other side, as did a lion asleep in a rushy bed in his path, red now from wallowing in the all-pervading red clay. He met an elephant herd, went through them and out the other side—you could see the towering backs swerving and dodging in all directions—for even Tembo the elephant, giant of all giants, has a wholesome horror of that long low battering ram running in and spiking his enormous fat tummy. Last, but not least, the day he went through and out the other side his blood spore had long since stopped, and the spell-binding, mystic moon found him still going when she climbed aloft to show up the night.

Kifaru did not seem to come out of that night anywhere at all. He just marched into it and the unspeakable thorn scrub, and vanished like a spook. One supposes, however, that even he, with his back-number brain, knew his own business best; and that monastic retirement from the public eye backed by as many and as fearsome thorns as possible, to prevent attack by enterprising lions, who might take advantage of the .275 bullet, was urgently prescribed by Nature.

One week later, after the red sun had gone down on the red hills where red rocks stuck out of the red earth in all shapes and sizes among riots of red flowers, a red and monstrous shape hoisted itself swingingly up the steep slope with that effortless sureness of foot that, as with the elephant also, is one of the surprises about a rhinoceros. Of course Kifaru was not red really. He was black-gray; but he had been wallowing in red clay in a pond of that red land, and, as if his own thick skin were not enough, had plastered himself with an armor-coating of the landscape, so to speak. Scarcely of this age, and hardly beautiful at any time, Kifaru now resembled more than ever some terrific prehistoric beast of the Tertiary age, which, in fact, was just what he was.

The moon slipped above the crest of that hill, which had been a volcano once, and lit a weird path full of flitting tiny klipspringer antelopes, bouncing like chamois from rock to rock on their toes, like very spirits of the place, as Kifaru climbed.

Far up, half an hour before, a lion had flung forth his deep, coughing, bass thunder, and the rhinoceros met the royal pair now, slouching down to the plains to make their kill. His short-sighted eyes may not have seen, though certainly his wonderful nose did not fail to scent them; but he never turned aside. He never swerved, hesitated, nor faltered. It was the lions who had to do that, or be trodden upon, growling and snarling horribly, as do all tyrants when they have to give way. The lion even made a gripping pass at him with his great paw when he had gone by, but Kifaru spun, literally spun around in his stride with such surprising agility and readiness that King Leo thought it prudent to go on down-hill.

Anon, Kifaru came to a track beaten flat on the steep ascent. He stopped for a moment and looked—if he could see—down upon the wilderness spread in the moonlight at his feet. Then following the path, climbed again.

Evidently that path had not been made in a day or a year, or a century even. Kifaru, for all I know for certain, may have climbed it as a baby on the day Queen Victoria ascended the throne and it was old, old then. Only rhinoceroses could have beaten a track pavement-flat like that—rhinoceroses or elephants, and considerably more than one, too.

At that elevation, though within a few miles of the equator, it was cold, even almost frosty. Heather, bramble and bracken grew at every turn. It might have been a scene in the Scotch Highlands, if Kifaru had not continued climbing till all vegetation stopped, and there were only the naked boulders, and the lip of the extinct crater atop, when it might have been a scene in the moon—but for the noise. And the noise was over the lip of the crater. And it was the most extraordinary din you ever heard or dreamed of. And it made Kifaru stop as he topped the crest, stop short and listen, rigid, carven, monstrous, grotesque.

I do not know what Kifaru saw because he was so beastly near-sighted. What he heard and smelt was quite enough for his ears and nose, sharp even for a citizen of Nature.

There was the crater—the moon showed it—stark, and cold, and naked; indecently bold, horribly crude. There was a pool of water; but it looked like molten silver really in that light, filling the bottom of the crater. There was the blue-black velvet sky and a round hole to let the light in. And that was all. At least, it was all the human eye took in at first. After a time, it occurred to one that the sloping sides of that amphitheatre were not sloping sides at all, but rhinoceroses' backs! The ground they were slowly treading into a pavement was hidden beneath their bodies.

No man knoweth—not even the *Wanderobo*, who are the wildest hunting savages in Africa—how many rhinoceroses there were there, and to guess were absurd. All the rhinoceroses for very many, many square miles around, at any rate. Kifaru himself had come thirty miles from the river, alone; and there were others— But never mind.

The map, and all natives, said this was a district without water; but perhaps the *Wanderobo* knew. Anyway, you might have passed the volcano a few hundred yards on the other side, and never guessed what a natural reservoir of clear water there was over the lip.

But that was only a side count. What did matter was the rhino. All patterns, and makes, and shapes, and plans of rhinoceros were there in that elemental place. Rhino there were, low and of great length; leggy rhino, rhino fat and tubby; rhino with front horns aspiring for records; rhino with back horns longest; rhino with both horns equal, with long thin horns, short stubby horns, sharp horns, blunt horns, malformed horns, three horns, and no horns at all! They were all there; nearly all squealing like a thousand ungreased brakes, snorting, or blowing off steam like all the engines of a terminal roundhouse, and all pushing, and shoving, and squeezing like pigs in a cattle-market pen, toward the pool.

They were all there for water—perhaps. Certainly water rhino must have. But Kifaru had marched thirty miles from water, for one, so—that's that.

Another, too, could not have stayed there in that press solely for water, at any rate; for she was standing smack in the middle of the pool all shining wet, and remarkable—besides the shrillness of her locomotive-whistle squeal—in that she owned the longest, thinnest pair of bayonet horns that ever you did see. By the slenderness of her horns one knew her sex; but Kifaru, being far away, must have gained enlightenment otherwise.

Rhinoceroses were continually arriving and leaving the assembly, going off arm and arm, so to speak, to their respective corners of the wilderness; but Kifaru, I suspect, for all his age, was the only one of the whole lot who, from the day the .450 express-rifle bullet coming from nowhere special took his mother in the forward ribs and she died, had never seen a rhinoceros before. Now he was seeing them in bulk, was looking down upon the annual dance of the rhinoceroses in their ball-room. At least, that is what the natives think; but you can call it what you like. Elephants indulge in a yearly ball, so why not rhinos? Only, in this case, it was not so much a dance as a "scrum."

Kifaru, however, was "the goods." For a space he had remained transfixed, mesmerized. Then what he saw and heard—you could not have heard yourself shout above the din—went to his head, and he galloped down that slope and into that heaving mass like a—like an avalanche.

It will always remain one of the mysteries of Kifaru's career—but then we know so little of their life, anyway, only plenty after their death—how he managed to get through that conglomeration of assembled monsters without being: 1, squeezed flat; 2, horned to ribbons; or 3, trampled to mud; but he did, though it took him some time, and the whistling snorts, the squealing and the general terrifying uproar in his vicinity was prodigious.

Now the position of that black, bayonet-horned female bulk in the middle of that pool there, though it appeared precarious, was really peculiar. With squeals that absolutely made one deaf, she rushed upon and drove off every other rhino that attempted to drink at the pool, male or female, and so shamefully selfishly conducted herself that, unless they were willing to fight for it, it looked any odds on the whole gathering going without a drink that night. Of course they could have fought for it, but the bull rhinos seemed to feel restrained by some antediluvian or pachydermatous etiquette about "going for" a lady, while the cows appeared to take into consideration the obvious facts, as revealed by moonlight, that this was not only a lady rhinoceros of exceptional bulk, but that her horns were abominably long.

Therefore, all the noise. Therefore, also, no water. But how human, after all. How like a profiteer, or a financier running a corner in, shall we say, wine, or—yes, after all, that is better—how like the prohibitionists.

Rhinoceroses possess the tempers of Eblis at the best of times, and it takes very, very little to touch them off, so to speak. All the same, I think things must have transpired to Kifaru in forcing his way through that crowd that would have slain a lesser brute. Be that as it may, Kifaru arrived at the pool on end with rage—literally on end, I mean, prancing on his hind legs, dancing, pawing the cold night, choking, back-firing, exploding with rage, spinning round and round, darting hither and yon, and generally behaving as if possessed of all the devils on cinders.

The big female rhinoceros, standing in the pond, watched him. She watched him lower his hooky nose and drink. She watched another vast bull rhino bulk hurl at him with the deadly low, long, sudden rush of all the pigs, hurl himself at Kifaru's battle-ship-like stern, and—meet Kifaru's yard-long curving murderous front horn instead. You know the awful heaving, wrenching, sidelong slash of the pigs. Just so, it lifted that rhino almost bodily into the air instead. How Kifaru had swerved his ponderous bulk about in the quarter-second of grace and with no warning given is one of those unfathomable secrets of the great pachyderms that Nature has not so far chosen to reveal. One thing only we know: power, steam-power, could not have spun his tons' burden round in the time, or rather the lack of time, he received, any way.

And it was a terrible thing, that terrific rending, lifting stroke. It even drove Kifaru back on to his haunches like no more than a dog; for you can not stop two or three tons' weight charging at say twenty miles an hour quite instantly without things happening. They did. There was a sound like the last despairing shriek of boilers before they burst. There was an explosion of dust and stones and lava, as if an earthquake had selected that spot to start life in, and—there was the other bull rhinoceros rolling upon his side, crater open, and spurting blood with every kick.

Then Kifaru looked round at the landscape. Kifaru tossed his odd long snout. Kifaru *drank* long and thirstily, none approaching to say him nay. And—Kifaru walked up to the cow rhinoceros with the long thin horns and the short thin temper, and the dog-in-the-manger disposition, who had stood all the time as if turned to stone in the silvered trembling ripples. Nay, he did more: he squealed at her a squeal that would have made even sphinxes jump. He demonstrated with his horns. He danced like a rocking-horse, only sideways, and—and she meekly turned and trotted up out of the pool before him, up the slope of the crater, over the lip—would pen could picture their gigantic silhouettes against the cold moon—and—well, into the night.

A week later there were two rhinoceroses in the district Kifaru had always resided in alone—two. And Kifaru was one of them, and, so far as I could ever find out, a good-tempered, placid, loyal old sort of a husband he made.

In the August EVERYBODY'S

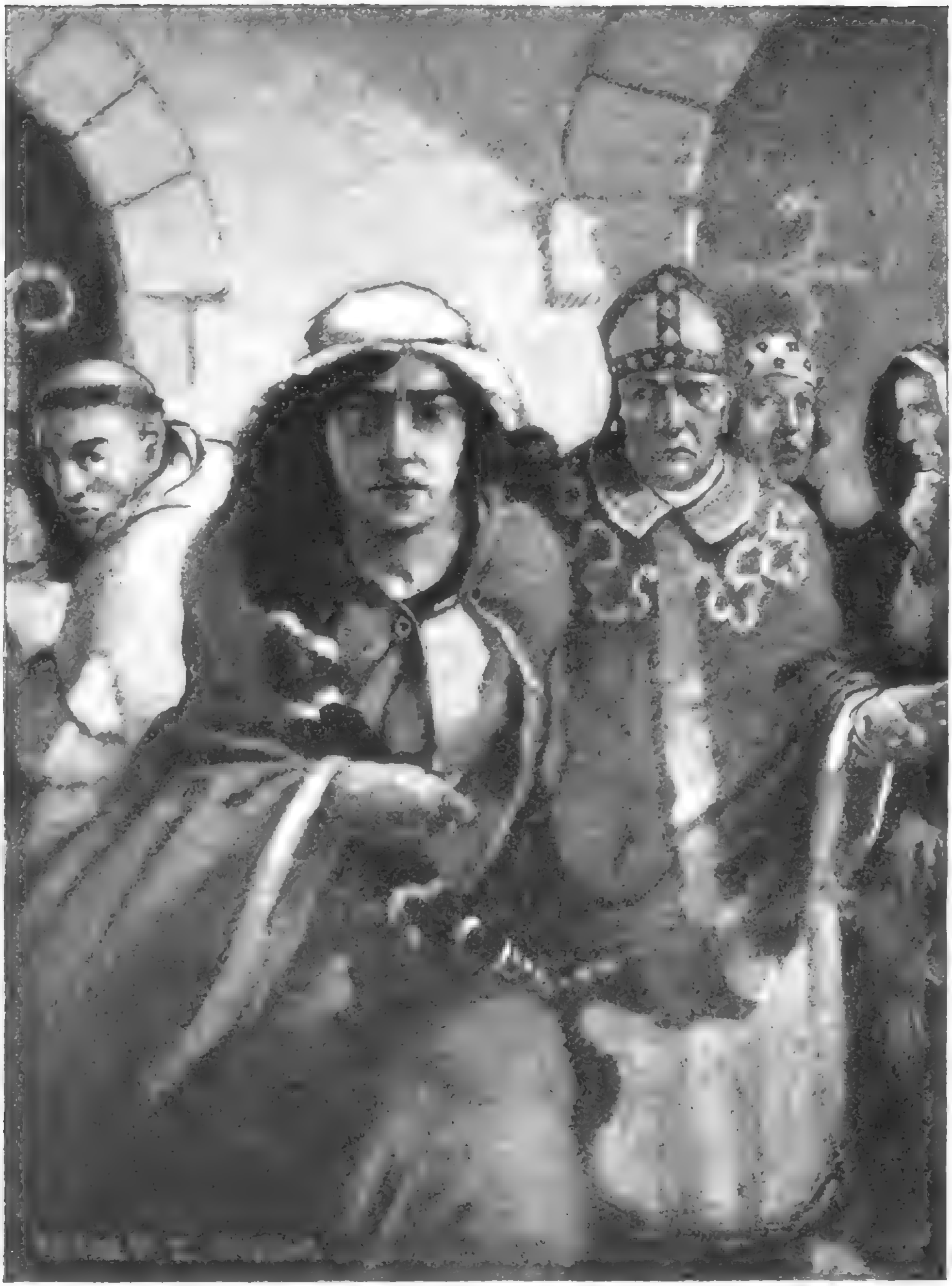
McCann's Danny *By* John A. Moroso

In which we follow a faithful father through the shadows
while he proves what a great love can accomplish

The Bag That Grinned *By* Wilbur S. Boyer and Bertram Lebhar

How a trivial incident will sometimes upset the
best-laid plans of the most careful criminal

August *EVERYBODY'S* Out July 15



Thrusting through the solemn ranks came a woman, tall and vehement, a woman somberly cloaked amid the council's splendor, but beyond doubt Eleanor the queen. "I claim to speak," she cried, and she swept on and stood before the king.

Another Medieval Romance, in which Bran the Jester Remedies a King's Injustice

The Fool and the Queen

By H. C. Bailey

Author of "Call Mr. Fortune," "Barry Leroy," "The Highwayman," etc.

Illustrations by Forrest C. Crooks

THE Queen of France stood looking out by a lancet window and in the green flat land spread like a carpet two hundred feet below saw neither house nor man. Behind her, her woman was huddled and stitched with blundering fingers. The queen swept out and began to climb the winding stone stair of the tower. As she rose into the light and clean air, a spear was thrust before her, a man-at-arms barred her way to the walls. She bade him stand aside, but he neither answered nor moved. For a little while she stood there, then turned and went back to the room below. Her woman was crying. "Out! fool, out!" the queen said and struck her and chose the window again. One hand wrestled with the other.

When she turned at last, she found a fool sitting cross-legged on the floor at her side. She was a tall woman and strongly made; she looked down fierce and contemptuous at the little ill-shapen man, hidden under his red hood with its cock's comb and its ass's ears. She stirred him with her foot.

"Peace be with you," said he in Latin, and tossed his head with a jingle of bells, and smiled up at her.

"Death of God!" says she. "Who are you, knave?"

"If that I knew, no fool were I, but a fool I am, so to know were to die."

"To the devil with your jingle. You are not my fool. Who sent you in his livery?"

"Sing soft, Cousin Eleanor." He took from his scrip a sprig of broom, yellow with blossom. "Are you learned, cousin? Do you speak Latin? *Planta genesta* here you see and who wears that is lord of me. Do you know the land which smiles gold in spring?"

"Anjou!"

"You have said. Henry Plantagenet, Henry of Anjou, he is my lord and my brother and I am Bran his fool!"

"The boy of Anjou," she said, and Bran laughed and her eyes blazed at him. "Aye, you mock me? I think I can teach you fear."

"Nenny, nenny, cousin. I know fear. He wakes with me and sleeps with me, big brother fear," and he plucked at her dress and fondled it. She was a beautiful woman.

"God guard me! Stand up, man, stand, never fawn on me. How are you come here?"

"Na, na, cousin. I am not here. Bran is not here. Here is only old Gilles, the Queen of France's fool. I am he and he is on a journey or peradventure he sleepeth and must be awakened," he giggled.

"See then, here is you, a fair lady in her prime held in a lonely castle and my saintly lord King Louis your husband looks down his nose and goes to prayers and all the world whispers. What shall come of it, Cousin Eleanor?"

"No good to the man that does me ill."

"Yea, yea. I can believe you," says he, watching her, and indeed the beauty of her proud face had a strange look of force. "Now there is in Anjou a hearty knight which swears it were shame a lady fair should languish alone at the will of a saintly king——"

"So he sends me a fool. Aye, a good, gallant knight is he!"

"Prithee, cousin, no more of your words, for they are but wind out of emptiness. Thus it is. When holy King Louis sent after you your tirewoman and your cook and your fool, there came a night when they lay in a tavern. And good man Gilles he fell a drinking and he was not and in his place was good man Bran, as like him as a fool to a fool. And here am I with my head in my hand. Will you take it, cousin?"

"Why, fool, what should you do?"

"What the mouse did for the netted lion. Give me your hand, Eleanor."

"Why then?" she said, but gave it.

"There is a man in me would kiss it," said he, and he held it to his cheek a moment and laughed and shuffled out.

THE queen sat smiling. She was comforted. She found her world had not passed away. Still she commanded the allegiance of men. Henry of Anjou would serve. The boy was heir to Normandy and England. With him to her champion there was trouble coming on good King Louis. Caution, caution. A boy with a name must still be a boy and all turned on a boy's wit and a fool's. Who should trust them? Nay, let the worst fall, let them fail, they would make her a noise in the world and a tumult. She would not pine hidden away like a naughty nun bricked up in her cell. So she made out her choice and night came and she ate and was put to bed and lay wakeful a long while. She woke with a hand on her head.

"Cousin Eleanor," the fool said. "Cousin Eleanor."

"Rogue," she grasped his hand.

"Woman," says he and laughed. "Well, woman, can you dress in the dark?"

"Why then?"

"Because you must, cousin."

He heard a rustling and in the midst of it, "You are the first that has said must to me and I did his will."

"And I am a fool," said Bran.

"I am dressed. What now?"

"Now I make light." He struck flint and steel and lit a candle and going to the window opened it and set the candle on the sill. "Stand behind me, cousin." He stood himself against the wall. After a moment there came a whizzing sound, the candle went out and fell with an odd faint rattle. Bran went on hands and knees groping across the room. He rose with an arrow in his hands to which was tied a light cord and he hauled that in swiftly and after it came a rope. A moment he stood at the window listening to hear nothing. Then he knotted the rope about her waist. "Have no fear, cousin," he said, and he laughed. She climbed out of the window and slowly he let her down.

"God have mercy, God had mercy," he muttered. "The mother of what dooms hangs there!" and he made the rope fast and slid down after her.

She lit into the arms of a man who kissed her hand and cut the rope from her and throwing her across his shoulder made off swiftly, big woman as she was, down the hillside. He said not a word and she asked him nothing. But when he stopped by a muster of horses and set her down, "It is a broad back that bears my fortunes," she said.

"It is Henry of Anjou, Lady Eleanor."

She came close to him in the darkness. "You have chosen?"

"I can hold you."

"Oh, my brother," Bran chuckled, "oh, Henry, my brother, the dark will not last and the light is the end of this play."

"*Pardieu*, the fool is the wisest here. Lady Eleanor, I have no men about me to make head against King Louis. It is mount and ride."

"All night and all day," she said. "But whither?" And Bran laughed.

"We make to safety first." Henry swung her to the saddle.

And all the rest of that night they rode on through the plain and halted in the dawn thirty miles away and slept then in a village of Touraine.

You see them in the noon sunlight, the woman stately and schooled, the man jerking all his broad inches in his haste. She was the taller. There was the assurance of power in her dignity and the regular composed beauty of her face spoke subtlety and passion. And he, with his bulk and his awkward restlessness, his red face and his big ungainly hands working, he looked a boor and a boy.

She held out her hand: "Cousin fool, I owe you the ransom of my life."

Bran put her hand to his brow. "A

thing that I had I never could keep, but all that I lack is mine in my sleep."

Her eyes lingered on him a moment. "Dream well," she said. "And now, my lord, what will you do with me?"

"I will hold you against the world. If——"

"My lord, I have a husband."

"A husband? Well!" he shrugged.

"Holy saints, what do I know? I am hurried off to that accursed castle and guarded like a traitor and have speech of none. I am told nothing, not what King Louis intends with me, no word of what he has against me. Death of God! my lord, a felon is better entreated."

"They say King Louis is a holy man."

"And holy have I found him. Let him be what saint he will I am still his queen."

"That is what irks his holiness. He has called a council of France to Beaugency to write him a divorce."

"The fox! Divorce me while I lie buried! What is the charge?"

"Faith, lady, you should guess that better than I."

"He has none, I tell you, none. It is why he hid me away."

"I believe it easily. God's blood! Lady Eleanor, the king is a coward."

"Yes, he is a coward. Me he always feared."

"A coward and a fool. Let him go. You are well rid of him."

"No, Louis is not a fool. Oh, this is a foul trick in him!"

"None so cunning as a saint. None so cleverly a fool. Why, let him shame himself and break himself. I will maintain your honor."

"You!" she looked him over. "Oh boy! And yet not all a boy."

"Do you know me?" he laughed. "I promise you I will not fear you."

"Alas poor me! A life indeed," she said very placidly. "You are a quick man, my lord Henry. You have never seen me till this morning's light. And now——"

"That have I, Eleanor. I saw you ride into Orleans with King Louis in the spring. And I swore then you were not for him."

"Oh, a knight errant! He will deliver me from the tyrant. Well, it is an honor. But after all, my lord, I am not only a king's wife. In mine own person I am something."

"The grandest beauty in the world, Eleanor."

"The Duchess of Aquitaine, my lord."

"I shall be Count of Anjou and Duke of Normandy and King of England."

"Add Aquitaine to that," she clasped her hands, "and what a realm!" Then she laughed. "Oh, you calculate well."

For a moment he was abashed, but only a moment. "I am cold in counsel, lady, and hot in action. If it is well planned, it is not ill to do." He grasped her arm. "God's body! do you doubt I will fill your life for you?"

"I am cold in counsel, too," she said. "Look, my lord. If I go away with you to my lands or yours, King Louis arraigns me to his lords and I am held a guilty woman and shamed."

"Words! Words! God's blood! are you afraid to do what you will?"

"Not I. And therefore to Beaugency I go and face King Louis."

"What, you cleave to that monk still?"

"I am a woman, Henry. And I think it is what you can not understand."

"Women were made for men, Eleanor."

She laughed and he stood glowering at her. And Bran began to sing looking from one to the other with a twisted smile, and he shook his head at Henry. "Nenny, nenny, brother, we mean nought, neither you nor I."

"Well, I will ride with you to Beaugency, lady," Henry said.

"No, my lord. That writes me guilty with you. I go alone."

His face darkened. "God's blood! go, and the devil go with you."

"Na, na, Cousin Eleanor. Take the fool instead. Take poor Bran. He is the better man."

"What now?" Henry turned on him.

"When a fool is a fool there is no now but to-morrow."

"Ride with me, good fellow," the queen said.

"*Pardieu*, you will be well matched." Henry broke into the loud short laugh which she hated already. Bran looked at him wistfully, but he strode away.

And so the queen and the fool fared to the council at Beaugency alone. It was early in spring and the level corn land freshly green and all the bright air merry with birds' voices and Bran must needs sing back to them and the queen looked grim at him.

"Aye, now we come to it. Why are you here at my side, fool?"

"You have said, queen. Bran is a fool."

And thereafter they rode on some way. Then, "A fool to serve me?" she looked at him. "I love my own folk well."

"What can you give me for what I have given up?"

"Your lord Henry? Tell me, what manner of man is he?"

"He is as cold as you and hot as you. A reckless man and the wisest ever I knew. And withal he hath no foe so dead as himself. Body of me, who is it I tell of, cousin, him or you?"

She laughed. "You are bitter sweet, Bran. And you love him."

"He was ever a good man to Bran."

And again they rode on some way before she spoke. "And your good man, what was in his mind when he took me out of prison? To make me his, me and my lands?"

"God have mercy, God have mercy, will you be judged by what lies in the dark of your mind? I think you will go down to hell, cousin. No, faith, what we do is ill enough to answer. And brother Henry, he set you free and free you ride."

"And he might have borne me away at his will." She laughed. "The more fool he."

"Yea, yea," Bran looked at her. "Fools are we all, whatever we do."

"Why then, what is in your mind that you give up your lord to ride with the strange woman?"

"I looked at you. You had need of me. I answered. Oh, body of me, laugh at me now!"

She looked at him, the big head rolling and nodding, the short misshapen body, the huge hands and feet on a little man. But she did not laugh. She put out her hand and touched him.

And in a while they began to talk of what they had to do. It was plain that the queen was riding upon danger. King Louis was not, she swore, capable of thinking. "How should a fish guess that I want air?" said she. But the nearer they came to Beaugency the more folk would be upon the road. They might ride into the king's own train, they might meet some loyal lord who would snap her up for his master.

"And back goes cousin Eleanor to the cupboard," said Bran. "Yea, yea. It is like enough. But you should have thought of that before you cast off my little brother Henry."

"I asked the man to give me a guard."

"And very prettily do you ask, cousin. Like a child which slaps mother to get a pastry."

"Should I kneel to him, fool?" She flicked at Bran with her whip.

"Yea, yea, stiff in the knee are you both. And both be wrong and neither is right and that is the end of you and your might."

"Never preach to me, sirrah. Name of God! what is to do?" Bran looked at her with his twisted smile. "Aye, ride you back to him and tell him Queen Eleanor is trapped. He will love you for that, your dear lord."

Still Bran looked at her steadily and he said: "Why, cousin my queen, of you and me, it is Bran the fool I would rather be."

"Oh, I am a cursed woman!" she cried. "I must ever strike what I love. You are a true man."

"Nenny, nenny. Bran is the world's poor fool. Bran is a tool in your hand. Bran is the shoe on your foot. But Bran will bear you safe, cousin. See, there is Holy Church."

"God's body, would you have me take sanctuary? Man, I must to Beaugency, I must fight Louis for my honor."

"Verily and amen. And there will be churchmen to keep the lists. Lord bishops and lord abbots on the road, a holy company. Join we with them, and they dare not deny you, and under the mantle of the Church safe we come to Beaugency."

And so they did and in a village on the Cosson came upon the cavalcade of the Bishop of Nevers, who, good man, was much embarrassed to meet his queen in such a plight and yet more to be her escort. But the fool knew his world. The queen who quarreled with her king was a sore trial to his lordship, but a woman and a wife who claimed to be heard for the right of her marriage could not be cast off by Holy Church. The bishop promised to bring her before the council, and kept his word, and lest it might be hard to keep he let no man know of her coming.

The little town of Beaugency nestles between two hills above the Loire and so many folk were in it that March morning that the devil and all his angels, Bran said, would have been nothing regarded. In the hall of the old castle the council gathered, a throng of gray heads and rich robes. And when King Louis had taken his seat the Archbishop of Bordeaux rose from his side and said that their king summoned them that they should give him divorce from Eleanor of Aquitaine his queen, "For that he has not confidence in his wife and can never be assured respecting the line that shall spring from her." He stopped, he stood without words. Thrusting through the solemn ranks came a woman, tall and vehement, a woman somberly cloaked amid the council's splendor, but beyond doubt Eleanor the queen. "I claim to speak," she cried, and she swept on and stood before the king.

He would not look at her. He shrank upon himself and his eyes went to this side and that and he plucked at his knees.

"What have you against me, Louis?" her voice rang out.

He turned as he sat. "It is not seemly, my lord," he laid his hand on the archbishop's.

"I will be heard," she cried. "What have you against me, Louis?"

He pulled at the archbishop, but found no help nor prompting and the queen took hold of him. "You know," he mumbled and shrank away.

"I know well. I am a living woman. That is all my sin. Therefore I was shut up in secret that I should not be heard."

"Ah, how came you here now?" the king panted. "Who brought you?"

"I am here to fight for my honor. Who denies me that? I am the Queen of France, I am a wife whose husband would break her marriage. He has sought to give me to shame unheard. He shall charge me to my face and to his face I will answer. God's body! this thing is not to be done in a corner. Look—" she flung out her arm, pointing to the king—"judge you between us, my lords." He sat there pale and shrunken, a gray wisp of a man in his robes, and she towered over him passionate, and all the council was murmuring.

"It is your right, lady," the archbishop said, and the king plucked at him and whispered. "Yet I beg of you, do you claim your right? Be assured no man here will do you wrong."

"I will be assured."

"It were scandal," the archbishop went delicately, "and of very evil example that we debate of ill living."

"Let him that charges prove or own his lie."

"You deny all?"

"What is charged upon me?"

"You have heard, lady."

"The king says he has not confidence in his wife. The queen says she has not confidence in her husband. Judge, my lords. He would have hid me that I should not answer him. I come to hear him answer me."

"Oh, oh, a brazen woman!" the king cried out. "What of—" but the archbishop bent over him enveloping him like a cloak. And the queen laughed. When the archbishop rose again, he was smiling.

"Lady, do you uphold your marriage?"

SHE stared at him as though she wondered at his insolence, his folly. She gave herself time to think, then: "God's body! my lord, who would cling to such marriage as mine?" she cried. "What woman would cleave to a husband who has put such wrong upon her? But in marriage or out of marriage I will have my honor clean."

And the archbishop still smiled. "It has been said to me that your marriage is no marriage, lady."

"Who said that, he said well."

"Since the king and you," the archbishop had more confidence now, "being of cousinhood within the degrees forbidden may not be man and wife."

"If so it be, let it be so, my lord."

"We will be advised on it," his grace nodded generally and in particular.

"A chair for the queen," said she. And advised on it they were, and they sat all day and read the canon law and heard its doctors and in the twilight declared king and queen too near akin to marry and the marriage null. So to the great content of peaceful men the wise council of Beaugency satisfied both queen and king. "By my faith," said the queen as she went her way, "I have not seen Louis smile these five years. Thank God, I shall not see it again."

When she came back to her lodging, there lay Bran on his stomach before the hearth with his big head cradled between his elbows. "What do I call you now, cousin?" he said.

"Neither wife nor widow nor maid," she laughed.

"And she that is nothing is naught."

"I am free."

"Who is, is dead. Here lies Eleanor, Queen of France. Pray for her soul."

"It is a bitter fool." She bent and touched him.

"Nenny, nenny. Rest in peace! But poor Bran is lost in the dark. Gossip Eleanor was desperate to fight all the world for her marriage. And gossip Eleanor rides into the lists and bids the holy men unmarry her. And it is lightly done and none so merry as she. Are you here, cousin, are you there, are you anywhere?"

"I am a woman, Bran."

"God have mercy, that is no answer."

"I have my life again."

"So down you sit to dice with God!"

But she was happy, and soon eager to go back to her own country she chose for escort a churchman, the Bishop of Tours, and set out.

It was always a rich and laughing land, a land of clear sky and mellow air. Between the round hills, down a valley of corn and vineyards, the broad river winds placid as though seeing it you looked through the earth into another sky, so the sky is reflected, and in this firmament hang a hundred green islets, joyous fairylands.

On the river bank under the willows the queen lay and Bran sat beside her, sometimes weaving a crown of yellow iris, sometimes looking at the flowing lines of her body's beauty.

"It must be time to ride on," she said, but she did not move.

"Whither? We shall find no better than what is here."

"Well said, fool." She turned on her elbow and looked at him, smiling.

"Yea, yea, it is well for the fool. What is it for the queen?"

"Well and very well: let us dream the world away."

"Dream, dream," Bran said, "dream that life is good. There is none in the world but you and me and you lie among the flowers and there is no need we know nor time, but I see you, I am beside you and you—you are happy. Dream on, cousin."

"Why did you leave your Henry of Anjou for me?"

"You are a woman, cousin, you were going alone upon danger."

"Why?" she said, and she smiled.

"You are a woman and cruel," he cried. "Ask me my shame. You know and well you know." He caught her hand and kissed it and fondled it.

"Poor Bran!" she said.

"Aye, aye, pity poor Bran," he laughed.

"You shall never leave me."

He started up, he pulled a grotesque face. "The lady Eleanor's fool am I. For ever and for ever and for ever. Nay, laugh, cousin, laugh; am I not the drollest fool?" and he acted horribly a blind cripple.

"Faith, you are a mad fellow," says she, laughing. "Come, cousin fool, we must ride."

"Yea, yea, ride out of dreams. And yet whither, cousin?"

"Why, to my own realm."

"And there sit by the fire and spin."

"Well. It is a good land, mine. I have been up and down in the world, Bran, from the Holy Land to the western sea, and none have I found so good as mine."

"Here is your crown, cousin," and he gave her the chaplet of yellow iris.

"No queen but yours, Bran," she laughed. "No queen now, nor wife. By the rood, I have known many a man, but none that was worth my land and me. I will keep my land and my land shall keep me and Monseigneur Bran shall be——"

"Your fool," said he, and walked on his hands.

Then they sought the bishop where he sat blandly dozing among his chaplains and the cavalcade set itself in order and moved onward, and in the evening they came to the ridge up which the crowded houses of Blois climb to the cathedral and the castle.

Now, Count Thibaut of Blois was a great lord in all men's eyes and his own, brother to King Stephen, rich in his own inheritance and potent and still lusty and jovial. The queen was hardly in her lodging before a smiling bishop brought Count Thibaut to wait on her. He was grown weighty, but a goodly figure of a man and bright of eye. With jovial zeal he bade her come lodge in his castle.

She said that the count was kind, but she was no merry guest.

He vowed that Blois should make her forget her care, and she smiled at him. Bran at her knee was mumbling in Latin, something about to retrace your steps and reach the upper air again, that is a task indeed.

"It is not fit, my lord. I am a woman alone now," she said.

Then he paid her rich compliments and swore Blois should give her good cheer and left her.

"Oh, cautious one!" says she, pulling at Bran's ear.

"This lord hath a venturous eye, cousin."

"Nay, let a man be a man."

Count Thibaut did his best. He gave her hunting and hawking and jousting and mumming and in between and after and whenever an hour was empty, a dance and a feast.

So on a night, "What does this lord mean, cousin?" said Bran.

"Faith, friend, he means to please me," she laughed.

"And what does this lady mean?"

"To please myself, fool. Oh, Bran, Bran, I have lived long years with a monk. Let me live a week merrily."

"A week? Well. And if Lord Pharaoh will not let the people go?"

"We will provide him plagues, Bran." She laughed and fell to writing.

But Count Thibaut was from day to day more ardent, the generous lord was lost in the devoted knight, the devoted knight became the passionate lover. And at last he made his occasion. In her own lodging she was beset by a man who seized her as he spoke.

"Hold, hold, my lord," she too was strong, "you treat me like a castle taken by assault. God's body, I am not so to be won."

"I have wooed till I can wait no more. And you have let me woo and made me woo at your will and now must yield to mine. No, faith, your hour has come, Eleanor. And I have come to my kingdom."

"Yield?" she cried. "Who, I? You do not know me, my lord. I yield to none."

"It is the law of love, Eleanor."

"A man's law, my lord. And no man do I serve."

"You are mine."

"Death of God! not I."

"What!" He struggled with her and she still held him off. "Do you mock me now?" He crushed her against him. "That is your place, Eleanor. Aye, you know it well enough." He kissed her fiercely.

"You are a rough wooer, my lord," she said. "And very bold. But you go too fast. I must have time." She smiled and looked down. "Good faith, it is but seemly."

"Aye, that is woman, indeed. Faith, I mean you no dishonor. You shall have priest and pomp. But I am on fire for you."

So cunningly she won a respite of a day and a day. And when he was gone at last, Bran stole in. "And Lord Pharaoh would not let the people go," said he softly.

"Oh, wise man!" says she, looking at him with bent brows.

"I heard a priest that talked with a priest in the bishop's company and this said he: *Nubere per vim vult*, he means to marry her by force."

"Death of God, would he so!" And she laughed. "Yes, the man is a man."

Bran looked at her long. "Yea, yea, and the woman is a woman," he said. "And God have mercy, the fool is but a fool. Fare you well, cousin."

"Oh, wise man!" she said again.

But Bran slunk out of the room. Her hand fell on his shoulder on the stair. "Whither now?"

"Out into the dark, cousin."

"The dark and the fool for me," she said.

IT WAS night and all the gates of Blois were shut. Down the steep lanes to the riverside he led her and, watching the houses above the water stealthily, cast off a wherry. "Get you in and lie you down," he muttered. Then thrusting off hard he crouched down beside her and the wherry shot out and met the stream and turned and drifted down. "Lie close, lie close," Bran said. "If they see us from the river tower, we are sped." But low and silent, dark on the dark water, the wherry drifted by the tower unseen and away beyond the walls.

So all night long it floated on down the winding river, in and out among the misty aits with no more sound than the rustle in the reeds or the plunge of a rat, and she slept hidden and only Bran's big head and shoulders loomed like a gnome above the gunwale. But when in the dawn he could make out houses, he ran the boat ashore and waking the queen, "Say your prayers and abide," he said. "I come again soon."

It was an hour or more before he came, riding one mule and leading another. "Here is food to eat and beasts to ride. But God mend all, at what a price!"

Then they made a breakfast of bread and beef, ham and Loire water, poor souls, and thereafter mounted and took the road. In the afternoon they were aware of a cloud of dust in the valley and ever and again it gleamed.

"By my faith," said Bran, "the darkness cloud hath a lining of steel. Yea, it is the Lord Pharaoh and all his horsemen. And I think I am not Dan Moses to make the river into dry land. Hie off the road, cousin, up the hill into the copse there, ere they see us." So they did and dismounted, and hidden among the hazel boughs waited and watched. But in a little while and before Count Thibaut was come, "Why, God be good!" said Bran. "Here is another band coming out of the west. Whose men be these?" Each riding hard, the two companies drew near. "By the rood, I see the yellow! *Planta genesta, planta genesta,*" Bran cried. "They wear the broom, cousin. It is Henry, my brother."

"Ay, it is Henry of Anjou," she said. "Be still, fool, be still. Who knows what will come of it?"

The two bands halted under the hill and challenged and the leaders rode out alone. "What do you here, Henry of Anjou?"

"And you, Thibaut of Blois?"

"I seek what is mine."

"You have lost it, Thibaut."

"Angevin thief! God's blood! you boast too soon."

"Foul words are of foul mouths. I boast nothing I will not do. I say you have lost, Thibaut. I will make it good on your body."

"God rest your soul, boy," Thibaut laughed and turned his horse.

And Bran, watching the woman's face, said: "Yea, yea, now are you happy?"

"Look where he rides, the little, thick-made man!" she laughed, and indeed Henry's short bulk on a horse was ill-matched with the knightly Thibaut.

"All good saints guard him," Bran said. "Oh, Mary Mother, what brought the boy here?"

"Oh, fool," says she, "I wrote him a letter out of Blois."

He made wide eyes at her. "Oh, pride Poitou!" he said.

But now they were riding their course, each mail-clad man with lance in rest thundering at the other, and Thibaut was seen making that hardest, deadliest aim at the head, but a moment before the crash Henry bent to his horse's neck and while Thibaut's lance slid scraping along the mail of his back he struck Thibaut's shield and bore him from the saddle in a fall so heavy that the big man lay dazed.

Henry cast away his lance and leaped down and stood over him with naked sword. "The course is run, Thibaut," he said.

And Thibaut groaned. "It was a fair course and it is run."

"I do not ask you to yield." Henry put up his sword. "I am the younger man."

"God give you joy of it," Thibaut said. "Yea, and of her."

Henry turned and lifted his hand in salute and went back to his own people. And down the hillside came Eleanor with Bran lagging behind.

Henry turned to meet her. "You called me and I am here, Eleanor."

"So it is," she held out her hand. "And be it so. My lord Henry, will it please you be my guest in my house at Poitiers?"

"I will be your guest all my life," he said.

And down came Bran to them dragging two mules which jostled each other.

"Ah, brother fool, brother fool, so you have brought her back to me in the end." Henry put his arm around the hunched shoulders. "I might have trusted you for it, wise man."

With something strange in her eyes Eleanor looked from one to the other: "Aye, he is the wisest of us," she said.

"Nenny, nenny, let me be fool," Bran cried. "Oh, God have mercy, let me be fool."

"Give us your blessing, brother," Henry laughed.

"Unto him that hath shall be given," Bran said. "What do you lack? What do you lack? God help all poor souls lost in the dark."

The Winning Sister

Having to Fight your Way makes You a Scrapper even if your Eyebrows do Curl

By Helen Redington

TING-A-LING-A-LING!

Bill Jones came to his feet with one impulse of his supple athlete's body. Frantically he stared about the studio. As if every muscle moved only in response to an individual effort of the will, he advanced, automaton-like, to the center of the room, frowning at the door.

"You're a damned coward, Bill Jones," he said to himself in a voice as sweet and resonant as a girl's contralto. And he drove himself forward step by step until his hand rested on the door-knob. "A damned coward," he repeated, and threw the door wide open.

"I beg your pardon," said the man outside, "I was looking for Mr. Webb."

"Webb—Webb?" Bill Jones repeated uncertainly. "Sidney Webb, by George! That's it! Come in, come in!" And he seized the stranger by the arm and dragged him inside. "I've been trying for an hour past to recall the duffer's name. Thanks a lot for telling me."

"But—" The newcomer looked about uncertainly. "I thought——"

"His apartment? Sure it is. He's out, though. Have a cigar?" And Bill Jones offered a box from the desk. "Sit down! Oh, you must!" And he shoved his reluctant guest into an easy chair. "I'm jumpy as the deuce here alone, waiting for things to break." And Bill Jones dropped into another big chair beside the wide library table and smiled so entrancingly from under curling lashes that the other grinned back an unwilling surrender.

"You're expecting Webb soon?" he inquired.

"I am *not.*" Bill Jones surveyed the big studio speculatively. "Wonder where Sid keeps his booze? Oh, don't get excited," as his companion made an involuntary movement, "I won't look if you'd rather I didn't. But—" the voice grew plaintive—"I sure need a bracer."

"But if Mr. Webb isn't——"

"No, he isn't," regretfully, "but—" again with that note of cajolery in his voice—"I am. And I'm lonesome, and I've got to talk to somebody or go nutty. Would you mind awfully just sitting there and lettin' me shoot my mouth off?"

Bill Jones's blue eyes swept the other's hesitant figure. The well-shod feet were drawn under him preparatory to rising. The sleek hair was carefully brushed.

Then the temporary host came casually erect and strolled around the table so that he faced his guest. "You'll stay, won't you?"

The eyes of the two men met and held. Bill Jones stood easily, hands in pockets, feet rather wide apart. The whole face, blue eyes, long lashes, pink-and-white complexion, curving lips, was suddenly dominated by the outthrust chin.

"Oh, well," the other relaxed with a half-laugh into his chair, crossed feet thrust out before him, eyes on the smoke rings he was sending ceilingward, "have it your own way. Talk your fool head off, Sister, if you've got to."

Bill Jones's slim shoulders straightened, the blue eyes turned black. "Where do you get that 'sister' stuff," he demanded in a voice whose silky sweetness was somehow menacing.

"Sorry," the other flushed. "I don't know your name—and—why—I——"

"My fault." Bill Jones was sunny again. "I'm too darned sensitive about my looks. I can lick any fellow not more'n twice my size, but I can't stop 'em callin' me Sister. I don't like whisky much, but I've drunk it by the bucketful just to show 'em I'm a man behind my eyelashes. An' I'd be poor to-day if I hadn't gambled my fool head off with a half-breed who dared——"

"You mean you'd be a rich man if you hadn't gambled," the other corrected.

"No," the corners of the mouth drooped. "No. He staked his gold-mine against my booze-shop up there in Nome. And I won. You think I'm lying." Bill Jones blushed and fumbled in his pocket. "I'm not. Honest." He produced a roll of thousand-dollar bills which he leafed hastily for the other's inspection, and a bank-book whose total showed itself as six figures even to a casual glance. "No, I've got the money all right. But I haven't a friend in this dodgasted town. And, thanks to that—" he indicated the bank-book, "I'm goin' to be married to-morrow to a girl I don't know. Say, I'm scared blue!" And the moisture of sudden perspiration made the hair at his temples crinkle into curls.

The other laughed suddenly. "Do you know," he said, "I believe every idiotic word." And he settled himself more comfortably.

Bill Jones dropped suddenly into a straight-backed chair beside the table. "That's awfully good of you." He hesitated. "You'll let me tell you about it—and you'll sort of—see me through?" The smile from under the lashes was as anxiously ingratiating as a season-before-last débutante's.

"Oh, but—say—" The other sat forward suddenly. "You say you haven't a friend in New York? What about—" A gesture indicated the apartment, "Webb here?"

"Webb. Yes." Bill Jones also let his eyes take in the big portrait-lined room with its draped easel in the corner by the door. "Of course, there's Webb. But— well, he's not here, you see. You see me through," he wheedled, "and Bill Jones is your friend for life to the half of his gold-mine and all of his booze-shop. Only it isn't a booze-shop any more. It's a Y. M. C. A. hut—and right popular at that."

"Bill Jones?" The other grinned.

"Sounds phony," its owner admitted. "It's my name just the same. I can't help it if nobody ever knew me by it but my parents and the bank.

"They began that 'sister' business in college." His tone was delicately reminiscent. "First they laughed when they said it. And then they didn't. You see having to fight your way makes you a scrapper if your eyebrows do curl, but you've got to take it out on somebody. A visiting football team's as good as any other victim and right handy at that. You don't even know we play football out West, do you? Well, that *sister* didn't sound quite so bad when we'd just won the valley championship. Anyhow, I had to get used to it. The only time I saw my name was on my diploma, and once on a girl's dance program."

BILL JONES carefully relighted the discarded cigar stub. "She was a visiting girl." The tone was soft, dreamy, rich as velvet. It suggested midnight and orchids, nightingales and perfume. Belonging to a woman on the stage that voice would have made its owner famous.

"She'd come down from her home town for the game. Just a bit of a thing, young—not more'n seventeen—pretty—Oh, boy! Pansy-black eyes, cobwebby hair. An armful of pure sweetness, that girl! And—" he blushed apologetically—"the game was spectacular. And the fellows had to ride some one around on their shoulders. Better me than a two-hundred-pounder. So she— Oh! You know how girls are about this hero-stuff!" He paused, and inserted a cigar carefully between his teeth.

"Programs were all made out ahead of time for the dance that night. And of course they'd written me down as Sister on hers. When I was looking it over to see which others I'd best cut in on, I noticed she'd erased the Sister and carefully inserted my full name in her even, round little handwriting, William Seward Jones. Say, that made a hit with me!"

The pause was unbroken. Bill Jones, elbows on knees, was staring absorbedly at his own boots.

"Of course I oughtn't to 've done it. A kid like that!" He moved uneasily. "Funny how girls are about being kissed. Sore if you do, and sore if you don't. She—well—she just sort of gasped and stood off and looked at me. Felt as if I'd stuck pins into a kitten. So I had to kiss her again—just to show it was all regular, you see. Then she cried. Lord!" The young face went grim. "Said she'd always known love would be like that—first-sight stuff she meant, you know. Love! That baby! Well—" He drew a deep breath. "That was ten years ago. And—I've never seen her since."

"She seems to have made a deep impression," offered the listener.

"Impression! Why, that blessed kid has written to me every day of every month of every one of those ten years—mighty nearly. Sometimes I'd get a whole mail-bag full at once—in winter, you know—when the boats couldn't make Nome. It sort of hurt, reading her pretty patter up there in that old booze-shop. I'd gone up, of course, expecting to make a strike. And I finally went to store-keeping because I was too stubborn to come back without my pile.

"Then the war broke, and of course I went. Canadian first, then our own. Some soldier!" He laughed till the other, not knowing why, joined in sheepishly.

"Born a nut, you know. Couldn't help it. Why, one day we were diggin' in—Argonne Forest—hot! Oh, say! I'd shed my sweater and my coat and my gun, and that old gas-mask we were supposed to love, honor and obey. And then I'd gone after leaves for my bed. And when I got back the darned camp h'd moved away from me. Three days out in 'no man's land' in just shirt and trousers huntin' 'em. They cleaned me for fair on that. Had to drink like a swine and dice away every red before they'd let up on the Sister-got-lost, babes-in-the-woods line. Say!"

"And the girl?" The visitor's tone was polite. It seemed to say, "I've let myself in for this. I'll see it through."

"Those letters!" The voice was like a harp-note. "They were just about all I lived for. I didn't think much of gettin' back. It was just another letter I wanted, and another, and another. Funny little kid, whimsical, comical. Made you laugh and cry and want to kiss her all at once."

"But you did come back." The narrator seemed to need prodding now.

"Yes. Oh, yes. But I got sent round by Siberia. So I beat it back to Alaska. And didn't see her as she sort of expected.

"Of course we'd begun to talk about getting married. At first she was in school. And then it was the war. But now—well—as I said, with prohibition I'd turned my booze-shop into a regular Y. M. C. A. hut. Even at that, Nome's no place for a girl. She didn't seem to mind the idea, though. I was getting pretty scared. After all, I'd never seen the kid but once, remember. But she was expecting it.

"Don't get the idea she was doing the courting. I may look like a girl, but I do my own love-making." The lips straightened out their curves and the eyes defied the listener to think about the length or thickness of their lashes. "It's dead easy to write to a girl that looks the way I remembered her. And when you're lonesome you write a lot of mush. Just the same, talking about getting married and doing it are two different things. I delayed things some, saying I didn't have the cash for the trip. At that it wasn't being square with her, and I began to get wise to the fact. It was sure up to me to do something. And then that damned half-breed blew in."

During the pause that followed Bill Jones drifted to the window and back again.

"Ever in Alaska? No?" Both cigars were discarded. The narrator was too restless to abandon his strolling about the big room. "Then maybe you don't know that wantin' to do murder is just about as instinctive as gettin' hungry. There's something about a half-breed—white men are all right if you keep both eyes open and on 'em all the time. And Indians are all right if you stroke 'em down instead of up. Can't play horse with 'em, but what fool wants to? But cross 'em, white and red, and they'll double-cross you every time. Races sure weren't meant to mingle."

He was pausing now before that easel in the far corner. "That *hombre* sure was ugly," he said casually over his shoulder. "Whisky-ugly. I'd thrown him out of the dump once. 'Gainst my rules to bring booze into my hut. Had to have a decent trade if that girl was coming up there. Though I'll admit I turned cold every time I thought of having a woman around all the time. When I just thought of the kid it wasn't half bad, but when I remembered she was a woman— Oh, Lord!" The young man wandered back toward his guest, mopping his forehead quite frankly and grinning shamefacedly. "The terrors of war," he confided, "don't compare with the terrors of matrimony. War can't more'n kill you——"

"And the Indian?" The visitor was watching the younger man through narrowed appraising eyes.

"To be sure—the half-breed. Well—" one foot raised to the seat of a chair offered a knee as a convenient prop for an indolent elbow, "I most politely invited that red man to mush, of course, and he got surly. Every one was listenin' in pretty careful, and, believe me, I was watchin' my step. You may want to do murder every time you see one of those mistakes of nature, but you sure do go out of your way to avoid it. He had to have it, though. 'Not for you, Sister,' he said. He was drunk or he'd 've known better than to call me that name. 'I came in here to get warm and play a little game, and I don't mush till my game's played.'

" 'All right,' said I, on my way to him, my gun just about an even break with his knife for speed, 'I'll play your game with you. What'll it be?'

" 'I don't like your place,' was his next break, 'I'd change it back into a booze-shop if it was mine.' His eyes never left my gun, nor mine that keen knife-blade he was fingering.

" 'I don't like the color of your hair. I'd turn it gold-yellow if I had you where a clay-bank grows,' said I, watchin' his leg-muscles taughten.

" 'I got a mountain full of yellow gold,' he bragged. 'I bet you my mountain to your gospel-hut, Sister, I turn your head red before you turn mine yellow.'

"Funny how a fellow reverts, don't you think? There I had my gun in my hand. And I'd been living with firearms for ten years. Yet when I saw that redskin hurtling toward me, I gave one whoop, tossed my gun into a corner, and tackled low. A body flying through the air, you see, was just plain football to me. He hadn't expected it, no more than I had. It sort of spoiled his aim and gave me a chance to get my heel on his knife and a grip on his wrists. What followed didn't last long, but it sure mussed up the shop. You see I didn't want to regularly fight him, just tied him up, wrists and ankles. Then one of the fellows reminded me of that bet he'd made. You see we make bets stick up in Alaska, even a half-breed knows that. When I saw how yellow he turned I began to get interested in his talk of a mountain of gold. It might be all regular. Worth looking into, anyway. So I yellowed his head all right, had to take gold-dust to do it. He had enough of it on him. And that's how I got my mine."

"You mean to say he transferred a gold-mine to you on a bet like that?" The stranger's tone was jocular.

Again Bill Jones turned girlishly pink.

"Sound fishy? 'Twouldn't to a sourdough. An' of course with all that money, there wasn't any reason any more why I shouldn't come after the girl. Didn't I tell you fortune'd played me a dirty trick?"

"Oh!" The stranger was slowly lighting another cigar. "So—now you've seen her, you don't—like her?"

"Man! I haven't seen her! Didn't I tell you?" Bill Jones's voice took on tones of extreme anguish. "She's coming here this afternoon, so that we can get acquainted a bit before she springs me on her family. Thought it was she when you blew in. Gosh!" And again he mopped a damp forehead.

"In that case—" The visitor arose, carefully extinguishing the newly lighted cigar.

"Man! You're not going!" Bill Jones was hanging to his arm. "You said you'd see me through! You can't leave me to face it alone. You're going to help me out of this!"

"Help you out? Why—how—" The smile was the indulgent one called forth by beauty in distress, even though in this case the beauty was masculine.

"You aren't going to let me be married by a perfect stranger?" The silky voice became a wail.

"I don't just see what I can do about it." There was a touch of hostility in the stranger's manner.

"If I could only see her first! Just a glimpse, to see if she's the same little kid, or if she's grown up into a—woman!" The last word came in a whisper of horror. Bill Jones was glancing desperately about the room.

"Up there," and he nodded at the little, overhanging balcony. "I could be up there. You'd receive her, and talk to her, and let me get a look at her. If I liked her, I'd appear, *pronto*. If I didn't, why—I'd fade, and you could just say you didn't know what was keeping me. Wouldn't you do a little thing like that for a friend?"

Ting-a-ling-a-ling!

"*There* she is now! Oh say——"

Bill Jones bolted for the stairway leading into that sheltering balcony. The stranger made a futile grasp after him into the air. Too late. Neither hand nor eye could equal sheer terror for speed.

"Go on!" Bill Jones's voice prompted from above. "Open that door! Hustle!"

Mechanically the stranger moved toward the door.

"Say—" his hand on the knob he turned and tiptoed back till he stood directly below the edge of the prospective bridegroom's shelter, "I say, Bill—" to such a degree of intimacy had the situation propelled him, "what'll I call her? What's her name? Oh, say! I can't——"

"Dorothy! Dorothy——"

Ting-a-ling-a-ling-a-ling!

"Beat it, *amigo!* She's getting nervous!"

The voice somehow again dominated him. The door was opened.

"Is this Mr. Webb's apartment?" The tone was undoubtedly suspicious, almost hostile.

"I—I—believe so," the stranger stammered.

"I came to see a Mr. Jones. Is he here?"

"Y-y-yes! Oh yes! He's here." The speaker could not resist the impulse to look back over his shoulder at the silent balcony.

"May I see him?"

THE girl, no doubt despairing of invitation, entered and swept into the middle of the room. She was a slender girl, a decisive girl. And the stranger, who had trailed her dog-fashion, turned suddenly back toward the door as if expecting to see a third person following. But the room was empty, though the draped easel swayed as if a vagrant wind had slipped in after the girl. And a slight noise in the balcony proclaimed Bill Jones's watchful waiting.

"You might close the door," suggested the girl.

And the man, broken now to obedience, retraced his steps, tempted, perhaps, to close himself on the outside, for he started guiltily, hand on knob, when her voice caught him. He came back, head hanging.

"Are *you* Bill Jones?" she demanded. "You've certainly changed a lot! Well—of course—ten years——"

And her inventory was so complete that the stranger's eyes surreptitiously and anxiously examined the state of his shoe-polish.

"And you must be Dorothy," he stammered. And when his eyes raised themselves to meet the girl's she was smiling at him in open amusement.

"You've changed a *lot* since our first meeting," she repeated, and blushed. And her fingers busied themselves with the already perfectly adjusted veil.

"Haven't I?" The stranger's eyes had left his boots for good. They lingered now on the girl's reddening cheeks. They swept her in swift approval, tiny gray hat, soft squirrel coat, neatly spatted ankles. And he took a quick step toward her, eyes for an instant raised defiantly to the silent balcony. "I kissed you that time——" and his arms reached for her.

But the girl was too quick for him. "Oh —please—" she said from the other side of the wide couch. Her self-possession was gone, and her eyes sought the corner of the room where the closed door and the draped easel stared at each other.

For an instant the stranger waited. No sound from the balcony. And then he advanced firmly upon the retreating girl.

"You didn't mind—then," he reminded her.

"Oh—but I'm not——" Again her eyes sought the corner. But the wind that had busied itself with the easel's draping had died down. There was no further motion.

"Of course, if you want to leave—" and he drew aside stiffly as if to let her pass. "If you are disappointed in me, if I am not what you expected——"

"I'm not—disappointed. You're really —much nicer than I expected—but——"

"Then—" Triumphantly he bore down on her.

"Oh, you mustn't!" Her eyes held him away from her.

Both stood as if waiting.

"Sorry, folks," came a silky voice from the balcony stairs.

Both turned in evident embarrassment.

"Do I seem *de trop*—in my own apartment?"

"Oh!" The girl drew a breath of relief. "Are you——"

"Sidney Webb, yes." The tone became winningly ingratiating. "And you?"

She turned expectantly to the stranger as if confidently awaiting his explanation.

"Bill Jones—" He took a threatening step forward and stopped.

Bill Jones, now Sidney Webb by his own statement, smiled winsomely. "Your name?" he asked. "Then may I know, Mr. Jones, to what I owe this honor?"

The other choked.

"Oh!" The girl's startled eyes swept both men. "Don't you know each other? I thought——"

"I'm sorry." Bill Jones's whole attitude expressed the subtlest note of regret. "Does my not knowing this—gentleman—" he indicated the other by a slight gesture, "really trouble you?"

"But I thought—I understood—oh!" With a quick gathering of her coat about her she swept toward the door.

Bill Jones was there before her, opening it for her with the deepest concern.

"So sorry if my coming has caused a misunderstanding!"

The older man paused uncertainly. Then, catching his hat and coat from the chair where he had deposited them, he followed the girl.

"I'll be back," he said over his shoulder. "Don't try to escape. You can't get away with it."

"You needn't hurry," Bill Jones called after him sweetly.

"Now!" Back against the door, hands in pockets, he laughed excitedly. "Come on out."

During the pause that followed there was the sound of hurried breathing.

"You might as well, you know."

And a girl, pansy-black eyes wide with fright, cobwebby hair electric with excitement, crept out from behind the easel and stood flattened against the wall. The little fists were thrust deep into the pockets of her tweed sports coat. The eyes looked up from beneath the shadow of a wide red tam.

"You precious baby!" Bill Jones exulted. "You've not changed so much as the crinkle of a hair. You've not grown up at all!" And for the third time in ten years he kissed her.

"William!" Small as was Bill Jones, this girl tucked comfortably into the curve of his arm. "Who was that man?"

"I don't know," he paused between kisses to explain. "You see, I lost my nerve, thought I'd be afraid of you. I picked him up to stall a while—give me a chance to get my sea-legs. Soon 's I saw that blessed red tam crawling behind that easel all I wanted was to get those two out of here. Did it too, didn't I?" And he kissed her again.

"It's the same old tam," Dorothy explained. "I really don't dress like this any more. I thought you'd like it."

He made it plain that he did.

"But you do know Sidney Webb?"

He had her cozily on the couch now. And he wasn't acting like a man who dreaded matrimony.

"Sure!" He pulled a tagged key from his pocket. "We exchanged latch-keys in France and swore eternal brotherhood. I'd forgotten the duffer's name, though, till that fellow told me. Say—" and he chuckled. "Who's the girl? He fell for her hard and sudden, didn't he? Wonder how he's making out with his explanation? When I saw her come in, and thought for a minute you'd turned into that—" And he kissed her to make sure that she hadn't.

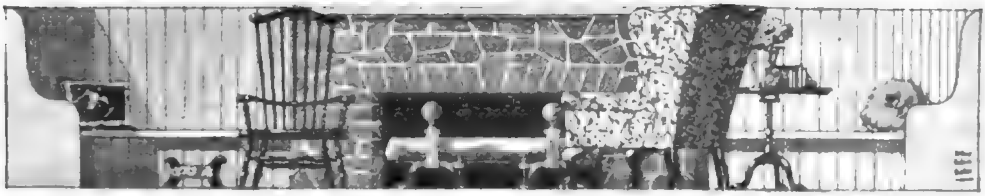
"I don't know her," Dorothy confided. "When I got to the door I was so scared—I picked her out—she looked nice—and capable—and not afraid—and I stopped her—and told her—and got her to come in—and sort of look you over. She was to come back and tell me. I didn't expect such luck as to be able to creep behind that easel——"

But this speech was getting too long for Bill Jones, who had upon his hands the task of getting used to having a woman around.

"They'll be coming back pretty soon," he complained. "Lord! When I thought that girl was you!"

"And when I saw that man so slick and proper—I was so glad I'd made that girl——"

And Bill Jones kissed her.



Everybody's Chimney Corner

Where Reader, Author and Editor Gather to Talk Things Over

JULY Everybody's goes to you in new size, new dress, almost new in type. Carrying out a plan for which it has been preparing for a year, it becomes an all-fiction magazine. When years ago the daily newspaper seemed to falter in its duty to the public, the monthly magazine, Everybody's included, made the critical article dealing with various phases of political and economic life a part of its program. Soon the newspaper, stimulated, perhaps, by the success of the magazine, began reclaiming what had always been its legitimate field. Then began the return of the magazine to what had always been its natural function: the furnishing of wholesome, helpful entertainment. There is no function more necessary.

And now Everybody's, starting anew as a lusty competitor in that field, aims to stand first in stories that entertain and that tell you something you will be glad to know. We want to make Everybody's so good that you will say it is First in Fiction, that if it's in Everybody's it's a good story. The new size is a part of this plan: by spending less for paper and printing we can give you more and better reading matter.

IN ITS new form Everybody's with its 300,000 readers will from the beginning stand first in circulation. We're going to depend upon this first three hundred thousand, as recruiting agents, to enlist the second three hundred thousand. You can do this by helping us make a better magazine. You can tell us whether or not you like this issue. Do you like the new size, the stories in it, the illustrations? If not, suggest improvements; tell us what you *do* like. If we have made a magazine that pleases you, tell your friends; if we haven't yet come up to expectations, watch us, help us and, when we do measure up, tell your friends.

We do not believe a magazine can be successful without close cooperation of reader, author and editor. They should get together and talk things over. This is the purpose of Everybody's Chimney Corner—an informal meeting-place for Everybody's family. Now that we have made our contribution, which necessarily had to come first, draw up a chair and meet some of our authors.

THE first work of David Gray, whose novelette, "The Wax Cylinder," leads this issue, was a series of fox-hunting stories which appeared in a book called "Gallops." He was just a boy not long out of college then; there followed "Mr. Carteret and His Fellow Americans Abroad," and "Ensign Russell."

> "The latter," Mr. Gray writes, "was the result of a year in the Philippines, cruising with the American Navy and scouting with Army posts. After that my health got knocked out, a mysterious something put my eyes on the bum and the period of happy adventure came to an end. It had been my theory that the art of writing stories consisted chiefly in having something to say and, as I had nothing to communicate, I knocked off except for occasional stories. Recently a new eye doctor has given me back my eyes and I have got interested writing stories once more but I find it is rather like beginning over again. I have a number of schemes but just what direction they are going to take I can't say. The war came along as I was getting started and that took two years, as I was seventeen months in service in France. I came back, of course, with "the great novel of the war," and broached the subject to my publisher. He told me I was a year

too late with it or nineteen years too soon, so there you are.

A READING of "Brooders" (page 59) will make you want to know Walter De Leon, an actor-author who, to use his own words, "stammers severely in ordinary conversation although never upon the stage." We add—and never on paper. But let Mr. De Leon present himself:

Born—Oakland, California. University of California, 1902—1906. Family fortune burned up in San Francisco fire of 1906, forcing the young man to go to work. Being author of several college plays, he went into musical comedy. 1906—1913 spent in acquiring a repertoire of seventy-two musical comedies and rising to the height of a star (Western). Author and composer of two musical comedies which were (westernly) successful enough to make money. 1913—1919 spent in vaudeville doing talking, singing and dancing acts with better half. The boy has photos of electric signs in front of several regular big-town theatres reading "De Leon and Davies." And they always wrote their own acts.

In 1919 the wonder child, a girl, arrived, forcing the young man to make money without the aid of his wife. The ideas he had saved up through the years of plenty were transferred to paper in the form of vaudeville skits, songs and sketches, all of which —thank Heaven—found a market. In March, 1920, the young man having tried nearly everything else, decided to write some fiction. Some one bought the first story he ever wrote, thus encouraging him to further outrages.

This brings the De Leon story up to date, except that he is to have more stories in EVERYBODY'S.

AND here is an author—Gilbert Frankau —an Englishman (read "The Moth and the Star," page 113) who is worth half a million dollars and still likes to write. He is first an author—and he comes by it honestly, for his mother was Frank Danby, whose novels are well known here and abroad. And next he is an adventurer, soldier, diplomat, merchant, and manufacturer. Also, his friends say, a jolly good fellow. Now at the age of thirty-six he has settled down in the English countryside—after a war career which began early in 1914 and finished, owing to shell-shock and general breakdown, just before the Armistice—to write the various thoughts that have gone through his busy brain during the hectic years of his early manhood. But for how long will this remarkable personality be content with his pen (Frankau never dictates), his paper, and his quiet study?

NOW enter Madame of the West, Kay Cleaver Strahan ("The Exception," page 121), who had to be coaxed to talk about herself. Authors are often retiring, really. They're not unlike other folks. She typewrites:

Whenever I get a letter from an editor (truth and modesty compel me to confess that such letters are not frequent) asking me to tell about myself, my family, usually a wholly satisfactory family, chooses the occasion to indulge in mirth and unseemly suggestions. "Go on," they say, "do tell them *all* about yourself. Make it peppy."

EVERYBODY'S, fortunately for me, has furnished a sort of questionnaire. "Tell," the editor says first, "how you write." I write on the typewriter from nine in the morning until one in the afternoon, five or six days each week, and I manage to make mighty hard work out of it. Sometimes I can turn out two stories a month. Usually only one story. And the pitiful part of that is, that when I began to write I did as many as six in one month. Only—usually, not always—now I sell what I write.

"Tell," says the editor, "how you came to write." As a child I was going to be "an authoress" and at seven or thereabouts told an interested uncle that I held a very low opinion of Shakespeare and that I intended to do much better things than he had done.

AFTER high school, instead of going to a university, Mrs. Strahan went to business college and was a stenographer for two years. This was for financial reasons. And then:

I married and found myself, for the first time in my life, with hours in which I had nothing to do. I might have kept house more admirably than I did; I might have gone in for entertaining. Instead I remembered my childish ambition, took it out and dusted it, bought a second-hand typewriter, which I still use, and went about story-writing. I don't like to stop—one never does like to stop the fascinating business of writing about oneself—without saying that I was born in Oregon and have lived there all my life, and that, since I suppose I must die some time and somewhere, I hope it may be very many years from now—in Oregon.

F ST. MARS ("Kifaru," page 155) proudly admits that he started life farming, "but soon left same, for lack of capital, to work in the wilds and study nature." He continues:

Born 1883, Kent, England. From the age of six showed such passionate love for natural history as to lead to some remark. Started writing age of about twenty-three. Author of various books on wild life. Apart from his literary career specializes in study of ornithology for a hobby, especially habits and migration of water birds and also in big game, more particularly of Africa, and in the larger cats and their ways.

EVERYBODY'S readers will recall Mr. St Mars's story "The Pack," in June—the story about the ferocious wild dogs of Africa. Mr. Llewelyn Powys relates an odd incident concerning these dogs in the New York *Evening Post*. He set a lion gin near the dead body of an ostrich and awaited results. Next morning a native reported that the ostrich had been eaten by wild dogs and that one of them had been caught in the trap. "By the time I got there the dogs and ostrich had completely vanished, all except the one wolfish-looking reprobate that was struggling to free itself from the gin. The animal had no idea of my presence and was occupied with trying to gnaw through the bone of its own leg. I could hear its teeth grating against the iron of the gin. I shot and there was a puff of dust just beyond where the dog was standing. The dog now crouched down and began giving vent to the most horrible bowling growls. I shot again and missed. It now began dragging the trap along in the direction of the water. I moved my position and once more tried my luck, this time with better results. It rolled over dead. I found when I examined it that its leg had been held by only one sinew, so that if there had been any further delay it would have most certainly got free."

ACCORDING to William Almon Wolff ("Thalassa! Thalassa!", page 128) the less said about him the better, but we refuse to be convinced; so here's what he says:

Editor: I have made diligent effort to carry out request to prepare sketch of your contributor, William Almon Wolff. The man's life, I regret to say, is an arid desert; made up of events most trivial and insignificant. He was born, it appears, in Brooklyn. About five years thereafter he displayed for the first and last time force, determination and a trace of originality since he then compelled his parents to take him with them to Europe. Returning, went to college. It is only fair to add that few traces of collegiate training appear in his work. After five years in newspaper work he began writing for magazines and has been so engaged for ten years. Has published two novels and appears to think that another will be brought out in October.

In 1918 he made a trip through the West and became extremely unpopular with two classes of individuals and communities, *i. e.*, (1) those he wrote about and (2) those he did not write about. He says with a certain pride that the correspondence files of the periodical that sent him had to be enlarged after his trip to accommodate the letters of abuse concerning him that clogged the mails.

The man's tastes appear to be simple enough: He likes music, is fond of bridge; boasts of close friendship of a number of interesting dogs.

With renewed expressions of regret at inability to meet request for sketch in manner more satisfactory, I remain, Yours, etc.

THE turning-point in the life of George Worts ("F. O. B. Cambodia," page 67) happened, he believes, when he tore up his schoolbooks at sixteen and found work as a sampler in a blast furnace in Ironville, Ohio. Here's the way he tells it:

For ten hours a day and ten dollars a week he went from furnace to furnace as the heats were tapped dipping samples of white-hot liquid iron from a running stream and casting test ingots for the laboratory. His face became a blister and his eyebrows and lashes were scorched off before noon. And on pay-day came the crisis. At home a letter was waiting for him enclosing a $10 check for an article he had dashed off on how to do something or other to dry batteries to make them last longer. His decision to become a writer was practically instantaneous.

An early developed craving for long-distance travel prompted him to study wireless telegraphy, and at seventeen he was in the Marconi service. Afterward he attended Columbia University for a year, then worked on a newspaper. His first novel, "Peter the Brazen," was published in 1918. He lives in Volusia, Florida, a "hammock town," where he has realized a boyhood ambition of becoming a sheriff. He is twenty-eight years old. He does his writing at night from eight to four in a little cabin off in the woods. Just now he is busy on a three-part story for Everybody's.

HERE is an author, H. C. Bailey, whose series of stories entitled "The Fool" is now running in Everybody's, who began by writing and editing a magazine for home consumption.

It was copied out in an exercise book, and circulated round the family hearth. He went on to edit the magazine of his school, the *City of London*, and the undergraduates' paper at Oxford, *The Isis*, in which a good many well-known men have begun their work. His first novel was "My Lady of Orange," the success of which decided that the historical novel was to be his job. Mr. Bailey is on the staff of the London *Daily Telegraph*. He tells how the present series of stories began:

THE hero of the stories is due to an editor, who suggested that a jester, a man wearing the motley, making a profession of folly, yet wiser and truer than the great, wise and eminent about him, would make a striking, romantic, yet real subject for a series of stories.

When the suggestion came, I was thinking of a novel set in a very early period, perhaps with Charlemagne for the dominant figure, and couldn't quite please myself. The theme of the jester took my fancy, but it was clear that he wouldn't go with Charlemagne. He mustn't be too remote: yet he would be impossible in any age when the court fool had become a mere low comedian. The one time that would serve was in the centuries when the king's fool was in fact a great personage, a man whom barons and bishops feared. That suggested, say, Rahere, the fool of Henry I. But Henry I's court did not offer enough character and incident. I wanted a real historic setting or the figure of the fool would lack force. Yet I wanted a free hand with my man. I wanted to imagine him, not copy him from Rahere or another. So I put him a few years later. In Henry II there was enough romance and tragedy for half a dozen novels and just of the kind to give my fool something of the glamour of tragic romance. I hope I haven't spoiled it.

AS FOR the manner of the writing, there was no need for much research. I had the period, though I have never used it before, at my fingers' ends, for it has always interested me, and the scenes in England and France where the story is set. The stories were written easily and, for me, quickly, though I can never turn out a tale so many thousand words a week. I plan the thing first in detail and it is not often that I alter the plan, but the writing won't come to order. I sit down to it every evening—"after-dinner brains," in spite of the old sneer at them, are the best I have—but how much gets done there is no telling. Sometimes it won't get written and I go early to bed in the worst temper. Sometimes I am still in the big chair by the hearth long after the fire has gone out, scribbling away over many pipes, with the writing larger and larger and the pencil blunter, till all hours. And always the best stuff is the stuff that comes fastest.

THE author of "If Winter Comes," A. S. M. Hutchinson, was intended for the medical profession and was a medical student in London for a while. But in these days he was entirely and hopelessly captured by love of literature and desire to write. Wrote. . . . Disease became so awful that he at length took the frightful plunge of chucking hospital and going out to earn his living by his pen. The first guinea he ever earned was thirty shillings, and he never got it. The magazine that sent him with one wild bound into paradise by publishing a poem of his immediately went bankrupt.

However, he shortly afterward went one better than paradise by getting taken on to the magazine staff of Sir C. Arthur Pearson of *Pearson's Magazine.* He never again can know the same joy and pride as on that day. But the glory and the dream dimmed in time. Wanted to be a novelist. Having left *Pearson's*, began to write "Once Aboard the Lugger." Found he had to live while writing it. Got a trial at writing leading articles for the London *Daily Graphic.* Got on to the staff. In 1908 managed to finish and publish "Once Aboard the Lugger." It was a decided success. Still gets letters from Americans about it. Started "The Happy Warrior." Was now absolutely up to the neck in journalism. Appointed editor of the *D. G.* Plodded on with the "Warrior." Finished it. Didn't quite like it. Largely rewrote it. Took four years over it, from first to last—writing scraps and bits in intervals of editorial work. Published in 1912. He left the *Daily Graphic* in 1916 and did his bit in the war. After the war he wrote "If Winter Comes," which comes to a close in this issue.

The rather curious thing (to him) about this book is that he had had all the principal characters in his mind for quite a long time. They came to him out in France and he used to think a lot about them and got to know them extraordinarily well. They were like very familiar friends. It was quite odd, the intimacy he had with them. What was wanted, if they were ever to go into a novel (but in those days he thought he would never write again), was some incident, some spark, to set them working one against the other. And all of a sudden, when he had left the army and was making up his mind that he must try to write again, that idea, that incident, that spark came. Those intimately known characters were suddenly and astoundingly touched into life and movement—and lived and moved. The rest was easy. The author believes it's a great book and there are many others who will agree with him.

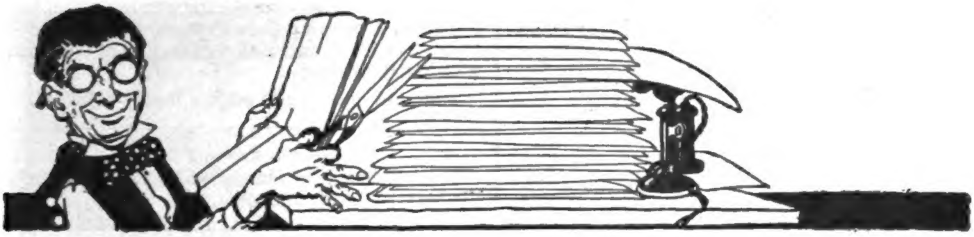
Mr. Hutchinson, who is forty, was born in India, son of General H. D. Hutchinson, C. S.I., pronounces himself a very dull and useless sort of person in social life, with no accomplishments or parlor tricks or brilliant conversation. Very fond of walking and likes walking clubs. Likes seeing people's faces and imagining things about them. Loathes and detests unfairness—meaning particularly the kind of unfairness of judging from only one side of a thing and not saying "sorry" with complete admission and widest generosity when a mistake has been made.

IN CONNECTION with Mr. Hutchinson and "If Winter Comes," the following is quoted from "F. P. A." in the New York *Tribune:*

> Speaking of Sapphics, it was only the other day we spoke of the cadences in A. S. M. Hutchinson's prose. Here is a passage from his "If Winter Comes," in the March EVERYBODY'S:
>
> "To help her. But helping her, unfolding before her in his own measured words, as one pronouncing sentence, rectitude's austere asylum for their pains, watching her while she listened, hearing her gentle acquiescence—these were most terrible to his governance upon himself."
>
> Which might appear thus:
>
> To help her. But helping her, unfolding before her
> In his own measured words, as one pronouncing sentence,
> Rectitude's austere asylum for their pains,
> Watching her while she listened, hearing her gentle acquiescence—
> These were most terrible to his governance upon himself.

NOW that the reader has listened patiently to editor and author, they will return the compliment next time and listen to him. If you have something you think ought to be said, praise or otherwise, say it.

SEWELL HAGGARD.



Prose or Worse *by* Gridley Adams

DO YOU BELIEVE IN SIGNS?

In Chicago dry-goods store window: "*Wanted—an experienced saleslady in underwear and hosiery.*" (*At least, I should hope.*)

On a Mississippi River steamboat: "*If eny one wants eny washin' or pressin' did whilce on the boat ask the made Minnie.*"

On the Elgin Electric Road line: "*Big Half-Acre Lots.*"

In a hotel in Grundy Center, Iowa: "*You will find rope in case of fire attached to side of window 7 feet from floor. If necessary place strap under arm and descent to ground will be gradual.*"

In a hotel at McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania: "*Don't throw nothing out of the windows. Leave it in the room and it will be threw out for you.*"

(*Jamestown, N. Y., Morning Post*)

Charged with attempting to steal another man's wife, Carl Lesnck, thirty-three months old, of Gary, Ind., was sent to the Erie County Penitentiary for eight months.

Then he'll be old enough to let them alone.

(*From a Cincinnati paper*)

For Sale—Three hundred and fifty dollar wedding outfit—Will trade for a good five-passenger car; has been used but one week.

One never knows, does one!

(*Ogden, Utah, Standard-Examiner*)

"Judge, he shoved a gun against my stomach and threatened to blow my brains out," said Eleanor Townsend, colored, in testifying against William Henderson.

Honest, at least.

(*Anderson, S. C., Tribune*)

Some malicious person started a report on the streets that there was something the matter with Mayor Snipe's head. We are glad to announce that it is as sound as it ever was and that there is nothing in it.

Well, that's the same trouble with other mayors we know.

(*Edgemont, South Dakota, Express*)

A new electric sign calls your attention to the Oxnard hotel. This hotel is absolutely modern and up to date, having just received a nice coating of tar on the roof.

A few feathers would complete the treatment.

(*Norfolk, Va., Special*)

Miss Ada Oakes, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Oakes of Washington, N. C., became the bride of Walter Pine of Salisbury, N. C. The best man was Robert L. Burl; the bridesmaid, Anna Lee Laurel, and the preacher, the Rev. Oscar T. Wood. The couple went to Hickory, N. C., to spend the honeymoon with the bridesgroom's aunt, Mrs. E. W. Shingle.

Re-forestation notes.

(*From Iowa Game Laws*)

If any fish is caught that is under six inches, and answers to the name of bass, catfish, pike, crapple, or trout, he must be thrown back at once.

Don't all speak at once.

(*Sheboygan, Wisconsin, Journal*)

Mrs. Henry Schild will entertain formally Thursday afternoon, the accident being her birthday anniversary.

They're all that, after the fortieth.

(*Newport News, Virginia, Press*)

The choir of the Hampton Baptist church is rehearsing the catchy cantata, "The Crucifixion."

The kind of music you'll find yourself whistling as you go out.

(*Dwight, Illinois, Star and Herald*)

All kinds of fresh and salt fish twice a week during Lent. Am also agent for the finest axle grease. Tom Thorsen.—Adv.

Just a wee pinch of the latter makes such a lovely garnishing.

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(*Davenport Democrat*)

Mexican Officer seizes an American Lady Below the Border.

The brute!

(*Credit Lost*)

Wednesday afternoon at 4:00 o'clock, the marriage of Miss Roberta Hill and Mr. R L. Townsend was solemnized at the home of the bride's parents. Rev. A. T. Bridges officiated, using the impressive ring ceremony. During the ceremony Miss Maggie Hill played Dvorak's Humoresque.

Where Roberta's little sister got the laugh on her.

(*Camden Advance Journal*)

Mr. Edmund Hornung was in New York several days over Sunday.

That's where they travel fast, I'm telling you.

(*Philadelphia, Penn., Tribune*)

The ushers were Messrs. Green of Merion, Pa., in white bridal satin, trimmed with the Young Men's Bible Class of Union Baptist Sunday-School.

My dear, you should have seen them!

(*Buffalo, N. Y., Courier*)

"One night I heard dishes breaking swearing," continued Hodges.

In their cups, probably.

(*Santa Cruz, Cal., News*)

She was sixty-nine years of age, and had been married for more than a century.

Which means that hubby is still living.

(*New York Telegram*)

Although McCoy was struck several times in the fracas—and twice between the lunch-counter and the cash-register—he refused to serve as the receiving station for any more of Murphy's soporific soaks.

Luckily, he wasn't hit in the interim.

A single Protestant man of good habits between forty and fifty years of age wanted to do general work at a girls' camp in Maine; schoolmaster preferred. Tel. Bellevue 1468-W.

"The line is busy."

(*Adv. in London Newspaper*)

If this should meet the eye of Emma D——, who absented herself last Wednesday from her father's house, she is implored to return, when she will be received with undiminished affection by her almost heartbroken parents. If nothing can persuade her to listen to their joint appeal, should she be determined to bring their gray hairs with sorrow to the grave, should she never mean to revisit a home where she has passed so many happy years—it is at least expected, if she be not totally lost to all sense of propriety, that she will send back the key of the tea-caddy."

Oh, the horrid thing!

(*Utica Herald-Dispatch*)

The bride wore a going-away suit of blue tricotine braided in black and a silver brocade hat trimmed with black cigarets.

Nicotine does make such a lovely contrast.

(*Meriden, Conn., Journal*)

Morrell Chase, of Hanover Street, is confined to his home, ill with ammonia.

All bottles look alike in the dark.

(*Little River News*)

It is rumored that the cause of the death of W. J. Evans, who died here last fall, will be investigated. Mr. Evans was thought to have killed himself at the time, but was later undecided.

Must have changed his mind again.

(*Brown County, Kansas, World*)

The J. S. Meek reception Saturday afternoon and evening was a great success. From 1,400 to 1,500 people attended. Mr. Meek says that fully that many people came and went. Just think, why there were 700 carnations handed to the ladies while that many men took cigars. Mr. Hinthorn received at the door, Miss Stearns handed out the carnations, Miss Lewis ushered the guests and showed them the details of the establishment. Mrs. J. S. Lewis and Mrs. Stull assisted in kind little offices, explaining the pitcher collection and other things on the upper floor. F. H. Snyder of the Abernathy furniture company assisted in entertaining. Mr. and Mrs. J. S. Henderson of Horton also rendered acceptable assistance. Telegraphic congratulations came to Mr. Meek from leading wholesale houses. At 6 o'clock Mr. Meek gave a dinner or banquet to a party, composed of the visiting traveling men, Mr. and Mrs. J. S. Henderson of Horton, Mr. Hinthorn, Miss Lewis, Miss Stearns and Mrs. J. S. Lewis. After this Miss Lewis entertained with giving a few numbers of her vocal selections as only she could render them, with Mrs. G. B. Merritt at piano. Altogether it was a grand occasion, a perfect success, everything passed off smoothly, and Mr. Meek's splendid new business house and home was opened to the public and his business of undertaking and embalming launched anew in the new headquarters.

Now, who'll be the first?

(*Ad. in McLeansboro, Illinois, Leader*)

Send ten cents (coin) for one of my beautiful spring folders containing my latest poem production entitled "Will Sweet Pease Be Butterflies When They Go To Heaven?"

Spring is caming.

(*Harvard '05, addressing an alumni gathering*)

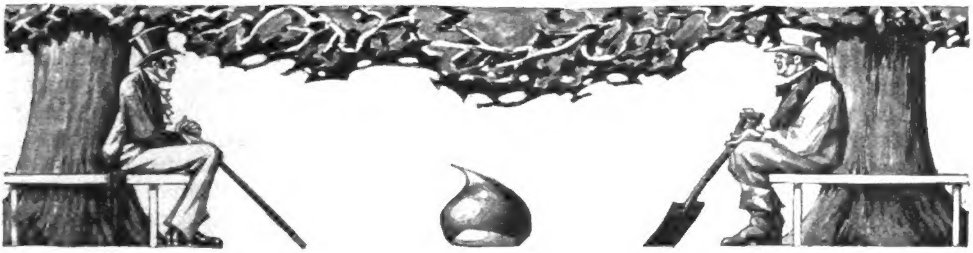
All this talk about Harvard being snobbish is tommyrot, and I speak from personal experience, for I was coxswain of the crew and knew every man in the boat except two, and they sat way up in the bow.

Distant friends, as 'twere.

(*From C. A. A., Chicago, Cherry Circle*)

The bride entered the drawing-room on the arm of her father, who wore a gown of charmeuse satin, trimmed in Venetian point-lace, and with veil of the same.

A case of double-trimming papa.



Everybody's Chestnut Tree

EDITOR'S NOTE:—Though the sign is the Chestnut Tree, no story is barred by its youth. We will gladly pay for available ones. Address all manuscripts to "The Chestnut Tree," enclosing stamped, addressed envelope.

JULIAN STREET was trying to illustrate the conservatism of the Maine backwoodsman.

Two of them were walking through the woods one day when they came upon the body of a man lying on the bank of a stream. They looked at it carefully, and decided it must be the body of their friend, Ed Simpson. They went to Simpson's house, a few hundred feet away, and knocked at the door. It was opened by Simpson himself.

"Hello, Ed," said one. "Say, we come on the dead body of a man over there we kind o' thought was you."

"That so?" said Ed. "What'd he look like?"

"Well, he was about your build——"

"Have on a gray flannel shirt?"

"Yop."

"Boots?"

"Yop."

"Was they knee boots or hip boots?"

"Let's see. Which was they, Charley—knee boots or hip boots?—They was hip boots."

"Nope," said Ed, "'twan't me."

PARSON WHITE: Brudder Lamkins, how did yer son come outen de trial?

Bro. Lamkins: De Jedge done give 'im two mumfs in de jayul.

Parson White: 'Pears ter me like as if you outer be pow'ful thankful. He got off mighty light, he did.

Bro. Lamkins: 'Twan't 's light's you seem to think. Dey's agwinter hang 'im when de two mumfs is up.

"MOTHER, I just saw a big lion down the street," announced little Margie calmly.

"Now, Margie," exclaimed her mother, "you know that is not so. I want you to go into the next room and tell God what an awful story you told."

Margie did as she was told and in a few moments came back smiling.

"I told Him, mother, and He said: 'Now that is perfectly all right, little girl. I've often been fooled by that yellow dog myself.'"

A LITTLE girl was entertaining the visitors while her mother added the finishing touches to her toilet. One of the ladies said with a significant look: "Not very p-r-e-t-t-y," spelling the last word.

"No," said the child quickly; "but awful s-m-a-r-t."

O'BRIEN was soliciting funds for Ireland. After he had finished his appeal he offered to answer any questions.

"How much of this 'ere money we're contributin' sthicks in yer pockets, Mr. O'Brien?" asked a big rough in the audience.

Immediately the man on his right hit him in the jaw and knocked him down. His neighbor to the left jumped up and down on his prostrate body. Two big policemen carried him up the aisle and threw him into the gutter. Finally, when quiet had been restored, the chairman advanced to the front of the platform and said:

"Is there anybody else who would like to ask a question?"

A LONDON temperance orator was in the habit of holding forth in a workman's hall, and was constantly being interrupted.

The next time he lectured in that hall he engaged a prize-fighter to sit in the gallery and keep order. He was contrasting the clean content of home life with the squalor of drunkenness.

"What do we want when we return from our daily toil?" he asked. "What do we desire to ease our burdens, to gladden our hearts, to bring smiles to our lips and joy to our eyes?"

As the orator paused for breath the prize-figher shook his fist at the unruly members of the gallery and whispered in a loud undertone:

"Mind yer, the first bloke what says 'beer,' out he goes!"

ACCORDING to Montague Glass, it is Leon Sammet, for example, telephoning to, for instance, Abe Potash.

"Hello, is this you, Abe?"

"Sure, it's me."

"This is Abe Potash I'm talking to?"

"Yes, yes. What do you want?"

"Well, Abe, I want to borrow fifty dollars for——"

"All right. I'll tell him as soon as he comes in."

LITTLE JANE, followed by her dog, Sandy, trotted in, holding out a paper bag.

"Want a wemon dwop, mama?"

"Why, yes, honey." Mama, delving into the bag, noticed that the contents seemed a little more sticky than necessary, but she took one.

Jane solemnly watched the process of absorption, then:

"You wike 'at dwop, mama?"

"Yes, honey, it's good. Thank you so much."

"Sandy didn't. He wicked 'em, but he didn't wike 'em."

MR. AND MRS. CROSBY were awakened by sounds that sounded suspiciously like burglars.

"You must go in and see about it," she urged.

Mr. Crosby's teeth were chattering.

"Sally, you go first," he suggested. "It is a mighty poor man that would hit a woman."

A YOUNG mule had been shipped on a freight train to a farmer in Fauquier County, Virginia. A tag with shipping directions thereon had been tied securely around his neck with a rope; but in the course of the journey the mule's hunger and natural depravity had tempted him to chew up both the rope and the tag. The old negro brakeman discovered the loss, and, greatly concerned, he hurried up to the conductor in the calaboose.

"Boss," he cried, "for de Lawd's sake, where yo' spects to put off dat fool mule? He done eat up where he's gwine."

RECENTLY there was much discussion about the proposal to establish the honor system, so called, in a large Eastern penitentiary. It was finally decided to put it up to the prisoners themselves to decide—surely they would know whether they could play the game honorably or not. It was put to a vote.

"Hey, Spike," said one tough-looking citizen out of one corner of his mouth to another prisoner, "did yer vote for the honor system?"

"Betcher life, kid—four times."

SVEN had been nursing logs down the river toward the chute to the buzz-saw for several hours when the boss came along.

"This bane too much vark for one man," Sven told him.

"All right," said the boss, "I'll send John down to help you."

An hour passed and the boss was walking by again. Sven made the same complaint.

"This bane too much vark for one man."

"But I sent John down to help you. Where is he?"

"Yohn, he ain't bane here some time. He vent down between two logs. I tank he quit his job."

A VIRGINIA farmer, hearing suspicious sounds in his hen-coop, hurriedly seized a shotgun and proceeded to investigate.

"Who's there?" he demanded as he drew near the coop. Silence.

"Who's there?" he reiterated with greater vehemence.

A longer silence. Finally a quavering voice with an unmistakable African accent said:

"Only us here chickens."